



**TELEVISION ENGAGEMENT WITH FOLLOWERS ON FACEBOOK: A CASE STUDY
OF NATION TELEVISION DURING THE 2016 ELECTIONS IN UGANDA**

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College of Humanities

Declaration - Plagiarism

I, Marion Olga Alina, hereby declare that the research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university and does not contain other people's data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons. This thesis does not contain other people's writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers; where other written sources have been quoted, i) their words have been re-written, but retains the meaning and is referenced, ii) where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in quotation marks and referenced. I also declare that this thesis does not contain text, graphics or tablets copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the reference section.

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DEDICATION

To my mother and the memory of my father. Dad, you pointed me towards the possibility of pursuing a doctorate when I was still young. May your soul rest in peace. And Mum, you ensured that this vision comes to pass. God bless you. Love you always.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how traditional media of television struggles to retain hegemony in the online public sphere, where other players such as ordinary citizens co-produce content- initially a preserve of traditional media. The study is anchored in the theory of the public sphere as espoused by Jurgen Habermas (1989), as well as the agenda setting theory of McCombs and Shaw (1972). The context of the study is the 2016 elections in Uganda, part of which period social media was shut down in the country, to prevent what government described as an intention to use the platform for spreading lies. This effectively integrates the state in the struggle for hegemony on social media. The study therefore presents an interpretation of how each of these three entities: ordinary citizens, herein referred to as followers, the media and the state struggle to retain control of the Facebook communicative space. This study applies a combination of netnography and in-depth interviews to bring to empirical scrutiny the use of Facebook in Uganda. It concludes with the argument that traditional media's agenda setting role is in conflict with the discursive nature of Facebook as a public sphere. The study further draws a connection to the clamped down radio talk shows in Uganda, commonly known as *ebimeeza*, to argue that Facebook is Uganda's new *ebimeeza*. A new term, *FaceBimeeza*, is coined to explain this relationship.

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And to the many friends I made during my stay in South Africa, thank you for being true. Let us stay in touch. Blessings.

List of acronyms

ACME – African Centre for Media Excellence

BBS – Buganda Broadcasting Services

CCMS –Centre for Communication, Media and Society

DP – Democratic Party

EC – Electoral Commission

FDC – Forum for Democratic Change

FRELIMO – Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique

FRONASA – Front for the National Salvation of Uganda

KM – Kikosi Maalum

KY – Kabaka Yeka

NBS – Nile Broadcasting Television

NRM – National Resistance Movement

NTV – Nation Television

UCC – Uganda Communications Commission

UKZN – University of KwaZulu-Natal

UNLA – Uganda National Liberation Army

UPC – Uganda People’s Congress

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Chapter 1 Introduction to the study

Introduction

This study analyses traditional media of television and its struggles for power and control in the digital age, where followers of online platforms are at liberty to co-create and distribute content. In this thesis, the aforementioned struggle is presented as existing between Facebook followers and Television over content. Another dimension of the struggle is seen when the State joins the online sphere to introduce laws that control usage, including shutting down social media at the height of the 2016 elections. This action of shutting down social media, as will be expounded on in subsequent chapters, is reminiscent of the power struggles that the media has gone through from the time of inception in Uganda.

The growth of the media in Uganda has been gradual, starting with direct control under British colonial rule. During the period of colonial administration, the media was largely used as a tool to exert and extend British influence (Mutibwa, 2016). This direct control of the media was continued by the native government at the time of Uganda's independence in 1962. The gradual shift therefore from having media entirely under government control to the current pluralism in Uganda has been and continues to be met with occasional incidences of stifling press freedoms and consequently that of the reading/viewing public (Nassanga, 2008). Whereas previous studies have analysed struggles for media freedom in Uganda and its implication on the constitutional right to freedom of expression (see Tabaire, 2007; Nassanga, 2008; Sekeba, 2017) this study takes the analysis to social media. The analysis presents a power struggle, since social media is available to all and can therefore be used by ordinary citizens, the state and traditional media, each at their own discretion.

The affordances of social media have therefore brought an entirely new dimension to this conflict of hegemony over media control. Social media such as Facebook, which will be the focus of this study, allows individuals to produce and consume media content at their convenience, thereby bypassing the traditional government controls. Followers are drawn to Facebook partly because the platform is believed to be an important tool in allowing people to exercise democracy

(Zuckerberg, 2010), especially in relation to freedom of speech and expression. Such freedom holds for as long as ruling governments do not disrupt the platform, for example by way of shutting down the Internet, blocking the site or levying taxation among others.

The social media site, Facebook, currently commands a following of approximately 2.5 billion active users on a monthly basis, making the platform a leading network site the world over¹. Such users engage on the platform for various reasons including political communication, marketing, connecting with friends and keeping abreast with news and other current affairs. These users include individuals, corporate entities, interest groups and governments. Of interest to this study is how different individuals engaged the Facebook platform of NTV (Nation Television) for political communication, and therefore what this engagement meant for the aforementioned power struggle. NTV is one of the media houses operating in Uganda whose programming integrates use of social media particularly Facebook. Uganda's Facebook users are approximated at 13 million (ACME 2016), a number that continues to grow.

By analysing the political discourse on the Facebook page of a Television station, this study explains how followers of the page resist power and control by both the media house (NTV) and the state. The followers exercise the aforementioned freedom of expression inherent on Facebook. This thesis argues in subsequent chapters that Facebook is Uganda's public sphere, allowing for the free expression of views by all followers engaged on it. From the pivot of the country's 2016 presidential elections, Facebook is in this thesis presented as a battleground of three forces; the media, the state and the Facebook followers—each of them trying to exert control of the conversation towards what each considers as the appropriate way of using the platform. The scene of this battle is the Facebook page of NTV at the time of elections. These elections, and consequently the entire electioneering process, were intensively reported on social media in a manner not witnessed in Uganda before (Rugambwa and Messerschmidt, 2015: 2).

¹<https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/>

This thesis commences by presenting a problem statement, which is key to the initiation of the study. The principle research objectives and critical research questions are highlighted. In addition, any gaps in relevant literature and theoretical framework are highlighted, with a discussion on how the study attempts to fill them. The chapter further lays out the motivation, purpose, significance and limitations of the study. It concludes with an overview of the layout of the thesis.

Location of the study

The study is conducted both online and in the physical. The online section of the study is the Facebook page of NTV², a screenshot of which is shown below. Whereas this page was populated with text, videos, images and other graphics during the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections in Uganda, this research is limited to only the text on the page. The limitation is to allow for a discourse analysis of the conversation among followers of the page, in reaction to the posted news content.

²<https://www.facebook.com/NTVUganda>

Figure 1: A screenshot of the NTV-Uganda Facebook page showing some of the posted content during the 2016 elections



The physical aspect of the study is Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, and seat of the country's political base. The Kampala Capital City Strategic plan 2014/15- 2018/19 describes Kampala as a city originally built on seven hills of Kasubi-Mengo, Kibuli, Namirembe, Lubaga, Nakasero, Nsambya and Kampala hill (old Kampala). The city has expanded over the years to encompass surrounding communities, making it the largest urban centre in Uganda, covering 189 square kilometres. The estimated population is 1.75 million residents and a day workforce of 4.5 million people. On average, the standard of living is considered low. Kampala city commands 80% of the country's commercial activities, contributing 65% of the Gross Domestic Product.

NTV is one of the many media companies in Kampala. It is a subsidiary of Nation Media Group- a conglomerate operating in the East and Central Africa region. NTV started operating in Uganda in 2006. Ipsos Connect, a research firm in Uganda, considers this television station as the most watched English station in the country, commanding 23% viewership. Its follower, Nile Broadcasting Television, has a viewership of 8% (Ipsos Connect Audience Research Quarter 4, 2017: 37). The audience research further indicates that Uganda has over 80 television stations,

most of which are privately owned. This influx of privately owned television stations is partly fuelled by the absence of an indigenous national language and by digital migration, all of which have left the media landscape fragmented.

Background to the study

Uganda's political history: Implications for the current political leadership

The early years of Uganda's political history before colonial rule, saw some communities organised under Kingdoms, while others were not. In this period, the present-day Uganda had not yet formed. The absence of a structured mode of communication in pre-colonial Uganda meant that the kingdoms and communities seldom interacted with each other. Interactions were therefore limited to incidences of occasional barter trade, in which inhabitants needed to access commodities scarce in their locality but available in a distant community, for example salt (Karugire, 1980: 17, 26). The period of imperialism in the 19th century during which European powers partitioned Africa explains how Uganda came under colonial rule by the British. The British first established their dominion in Buganda kingdom and from here extended to the rest of present-day Uganda, in the period 1900-1919. At the time of declaring Uganda a British protectorate in 1894 therefore, the declaration was only in reference to this kingdom (Mutibwa, 2016). Buganda, located in the current central region of the country, was one of the largest and arguably better organised amongst the existing kingdoms. The kingdom had a system of a king who held all authority in the land and whose word was final. Several chiefs managed the affairs of their respective jurisdiction on his behalf. The kingdom was largely agrarian (Karugire, 1980).

The year 1962 therefore remains historic for it is then that Uganda attained independence from Britain. As noted by Jim Ocitti (2005: 27), several countries in the developing world attained independence during this period. And for the case of Uganda, self-governance came with the expectation that the country would progress faster. This hope was premised on the fact that the exploitation of Uganda's resources, which had affected the rate of development in the country, would be no more. This thesis argues that the need to resist oppression carried on from the successes of demanding independence from British rule to contesting the authoritarianism exhibited in subsequent regimes. As of the writing of this thesis and as will be expounded on

later, this resistance has carried on to contesting control over social media—Facebook in particular.

To start off self-governance, the country's first government was formed through an alliance between UPC (Uganda People's Congress) and KY (*Kabaka Yekka*, translated as only the King) party of the Buganda royal monarchy (Bussey, 2005: 3). UPC was a political party initiated by the first Prime Minister, Milton Obote and is still in existence. *Kabaka Yekka* opted to call itself a movement and not a political party and as noted by Karugire (1980: 186-88), this choice of name was emotionally endearing to a substantial number of Baganda. A 1962 election to determine which political party was to take the country's top seat had seen the UPC garner more votes against DP (Democratic Party). To Karugire (1980), the coalition between UPC and KY was a collection of individuals brought together for the sole purpose of getting into power. It is less surprising therefore that although Uganda's independence was celebrated by the nationals as an end to British colonial rule, the political turmoil that followed makes it debatable whether the country was ready for self-governance. The political instability, as seen through successive military coups, is arguably a reflection of a combination of inexperience at self-governance, a greed for power by subsequent regimes and a demonstration by the citizenry of the power in their hands to resist tyranny. Each of these regimes had hoped that their approach at governance would be better than that of their predecessor, which may not have been the case for many of them.

This political instability after independence started in 1971, when the then head of the army, Idi Amin Dada, overthrew President Milton Obote in a military coup. President Obote is said to have been away attending a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Singapore when he was overthrown back home (Alina, 2006: 16). But eight years later in 1979, UNLA (Uganda National Liberation Army) teamed up with Tanzanian troops to overthrow President Amin in a military coup (Kasfir, 2005: 278). With this coup came the reinstatement of President Obote for a second term in office.

Important to note for this thesis is that UNLA comprised of two Ugandan contingents. One of these was KM (Kikosi Maalum) of deposed President Milton Obote and the second was FRONASA (Front for the National Salvation of Uganda). The latter was founded by Yoweri

Kaguta Museveni, who was to become the president of Uganda later and is still president as of this writing. Despite the resounding military victory, as seen in the overthrow of President Idi Amin Dada, Uganda still witnessed political instability under three successive and interim governments of Yusuf Lule, Godfrey Binaisa, and Paulo Muwanga (Kasfir, 2005).

History of elections in Uganda

In the year 1980, Uganda had its first presidential elections that maintained Milton Obote in power. Although this election was allegedly free and fair, the results were contested. The DP, which came second in the elections, believed the electoral process was gerrymandered (Kasfir, 2005). William Pike (2019: 71) writes that prior to announcing President Obote as winner of the polls, a directive was given by the then chairman of the Military Commission, Muwanga, requiring returning officers to stop declaring results or sending them to the Electoral Commission. He directed that the results be sent to him instead. But by the time this directive was given, some of the results that had come in had already indicated victory to the DP. Nonetheless, the returning officers complied and stopped announcing any further results, lest they face punishment. Important to note here is that the directive was announced on Radio Uganda, the only existent radio station at the time and whose ownership and control was in the hands of government. The low level of media freedom at that time could not have allowed for a debate or contestation of this directive on the airwaves. Pike (2019) notes further that this particular poll was extended for one more day, owing to a delay in dispatching electoral material to some regions.

It is less surprising that Obote was announced winner of the 1980 polls, for it can be argued that his team ‘cast’ the votes, counted them and declared the distribution among the contestants. This manoeuvring with the votes is said to have been done at Nile Mansions, a popular hotel in Kampala. Even then, a news story by *The Times* (London) on the contrary reported DP’s win (Pike, 2019: 72). Considering that Uganda was still an infant state and unfamiliar with elections and democracy, the electoral participants had little trust in one another, argue Eric Bjornlund, Michael Bratton and Clark Gibson (1992: 406). This distrust, they argue further, was as a result of weak and untested systems and rules to guide the entire electoral process. These were rules

relating to transparency of voting, voter confidence and expert knowledge about the process. In addition, was the absence of an independent media that could not be compromised by state machineries in probing the electoral process.

In third place at that election was UPM (Uganda Patriotic Movement) of Yoweri Museveni, who too was dissatisfied with the electoral outcome. He resorted to lodging a guerrilla war to unseat President Obote. This decision was, according to Joe Oloka-Onyango (2017: 107), a fulfilment of Museveni's promise. Museveni had made a public declaration of the intention to contest the result through use of armed force. He consequently justified the bush war as necessary and that it was a popular struggle (Kasfir, 2005).

In the meantime, President Milton Obote continued to lead the country until 1985, when he was deposed by Tito Okello, the army commander. Once again, the subsequent announcements of Tito Okello's takeover came through Radio Uganda as communicated by the 2nd Lt. Walter Ochora:

Fellow Ugandans, special announcement. Fellow Ugandans we are glad to announce a total coup in Uganda today. It was the total end of Obote's tribalistic rule. It was a bloodless coup. Civilians can join us at City Square any time from now. When you see soldiers patrolling around, you should not make any scaring issue. Thank you very much. Wait for more announcements (Pike, 2019: 111)

An hour later:

I am now going to close. I am called Chief Master Planner Okello Kolo. We have already captured Uganda which is Kampala now under us. For God and my Country, thank you (Pike, 2019: 111).

But Tito Okello's reign was short-lived. Yoweri Museveni's war was a success and in 1986, he overthrew the Tito Okello government. Part of the success of Museveni in this coup is attributed to earlier exposure to the Mozambican liberation war by FRELIMO (Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique) against Portugal. The exposure, according to Kasfir (2005: 276-277), happened

during Museveni's time as a student at the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1970s, where FRELIMO was then headquartered. In this period, he shared ideas with Eduardo Mondlane, the president of FRELIMO, on how to fight an organised government. In addition, he learnt how to mobilise the involvement of rural villagers.

Museveni's victory was celebrated by a substantial section of Ugandans, partly because he promised to govern as guided by principles of democratic rule (Bussey, 2005: 3). Nonetheless, the activities of political parties were suspended. The NRM (National Resistance Movement) of President Museveni was the only active political party. To Oloka-Onyango (2017: 107), NRM did not want to be blamed by law for turning Uganda into a one-party state. Therefore, the disguise of temporarily suspending the political parties and declaring that the country would run under the Movement system, was the preferred option. But in essence, the absence of political pluralism at this critical time of self-governance was detrimental to democracy (Oloka-Onyango and Ahikire, 2017). The country's opposition nonetheless continued to advocate for political pluralism, as was the case elsewhere in the region and the continent at large.

In 2006, Uganda held its first multi-party elections in response to political pressure on the need for allowing alternative political dispensations. Prior to these elections, Sabiiti Makara, Lise Rakner & Lars Svasand (2009: 188) note that in 2001, the NRM set up a committee to analyse the country's political system, the Movement, and give guidance on the best route for the future. The committee was to consider if Uganda was ready to re-embrace political pluralism by way of allowing the active operations of political parties, or continue largely under NRM. This committee recommended that the activities of political parties be allowed, which was a good gesture for democracy. However, these parties were to exist alongside the Movement system of governance, the largest political grouping at the time.

Nonetheless and as argued by Makara *et al.* (2009), the permission for political pluralism was not a stand-alone. It had a proposal that the constitutional cap of a two-term period for the president be lifted. These two terms are constitutionally five years each. The proposal was that Uganda adopts an open-ended term. A national referendum held to this effect came out with more votes in support of the aforementioned open-ended term. It is however debatable whether the citizens who

voted for the open-ended term were more in favour of this arrangement, or were eager to have political pluralism actively back into the country. The position meant that President Museveni was eligible to contest for subsequent elections until the constitutional age limit of 75. But as will be discussed later, this age limit has since been revisited. The next elections were then held in 2011 and again in 2016, with President Yoweri Museveni retaining presidency throughout. Statistics from Uganda's electoral commission indicate that President Museveni won the 2016 election with a 60% margin, as shown in the table below: -

Table 1: Table showing the 2016 Presidential Election results

Candidates	Party	Votes	%
Abed Bwanika	PDP	89,005	0.90%
Amama Mbabazi	Independent	136,519	1.39%
Baryamureeba Venansius	Independent	52,798	0.54%
Benon Buta Biraaro	FPU	25,600	0.26%
Kizza Besigye Kifefe	FDC	3,508,687	35.61%
Mabirizi Joseph	Independent	24,498	0.25%
Maureen Faith Kyalya Waluube	Independent	42,833	0.43%
Yoweri Kaguta Museveni	NRM	5,971,872	60.62%
Valid Votes		9,851,812	
Invalid Votes		477,319	4.62%
Total Votes Cast		10,329,131	67.61%
Spoilt votes		29,005	
Polling Stations Received	27,881	99.54%	

Source: Uganda Electoral Commission website³

The case of the 2016 presidential elections

Incumbent Museveni's victory at the 2016 presidential polls was not gained without ample competition from the other contenders. Different strategies were attempted by both political party flag bearers and by independent presidential candidates to ensure better success at the polls. One of these strategies was the formation of joint opposition coalitions against the incumbent, with the intention to front one opposition presidential candidate. TICC (The Independent Candidates Coalition) and TDA (The Democratic Alliance) were the two political coalitions formed

³<http://www.ec.or.ug/>

(Kayunga 2017: 81-82). TICC was comprised of 25 independent presidential aspirants while TDA brought together aspirants from political parties. In addition to parties in the TDA was a newly formed Go-Forward Movement of former premier, John Patrick Amama Mbabazi. His involvement in the race came as a shock to many, since he had diligently served in Museveni's government for many years and in different positions. Kayunga (2017) further notes that the much-anticipated intention by TDA to front a joint presidential candidate failed a few months after the initiation of this united force. In addition, Kayunga (2016: 93) argues that elections were far from being capable of resulting in regime change. This is because the NRM's hybrid nature made it appear to have democratic credentials, yet it retained institutional frameworks that could not allow for such change.

Another strategy by the opposition was the continued call for what they termed as a level playing field through electoral reforms. As part of these reforms, the opposition demanded that powers be given to the Judicial Service Commission to appoint officials of the Electoral Commission (Abrahamsen and Bareebe, 2016: 752). The opposition had repeatedly indicated that the country's Electoral Commission was partisan. As argued by Said Adejumobi (2000: 62), it is critical that elections are conducted by a competent and impartial electoral body, an impartial judiciary, a non-partisan police force and a viable and free press. Although overtime the calls for electoral reforms were replicated by several entities including civil society, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda and the donor community, they were largely ignored by government. Further frustration, especially for the opposition and independent candidates, related to incidences of intimidation and arbitrary arrests of opposition candidates (Abrahamsen and Bareebe, 2016).

Irrespective of the aforementioned unfulfilled demands for electoral reforms, the alleged environment of intimidation of opposition candidates and a failed coalition, Uganda went to the polls on 18 and 19 February 2016. These polls were initially scheduled for only 18 February, but were extended owing to a delay in delivery of polling material to some stations. This delay was reminiscent of the 1980 polls, which as discussed above, were extended for another day for similar reasons. Allegations of vote rigging and ballot stuffing were brought up by the opposition in the 2016 polls, again similar to such allegations in the 1980 ones.

As explained by Tom Young (1993: 300), elections are important because they legitimise the government in power, thus allowing for both local and international recognition of a given state. In addition, they are a symbol of a nation's sovereignty. They succinctly define the relationship between the governors and the governed, although other theorists such as the Marxist ideology, view them as a means of reproducing dominant ideologies (Adejumobi, 2000: 60). Perhaps Staffan Lindberg (2006: 139) sums it well when he writes "even a tight grip on the media by an autocratic ruler could be difficult to sustain in a situation of uninterrupted series of competitive elections."

But to Kwame Ninsin (2006: 3), the high levels of impoverishment in many of the African states have meant that elections are more about economic and social rights than civil and political ones. Consequently, the ballot is used to secure such needs as food, healthcare and access to formal education. It is therefore based on the promise and ability to deliver these needs that a substantial section of the electorate will cast their vote. The 2016 elections in Uganda saw a manifestation of this argument. As noted by Phiona Muhwezi-Mpanga (2017:123) that while on the campaign trail, the incumbent often explained that a particular area did not have basic social services because they had a member from the opposition as their representative to parliament. This was followed by a ridicule that such residents had not "voted wisely." This ridicule was arguably a direct call for members to vote candidates from the NRM at all levels. Gerald Bareebe (2016: 751) observes that since the incumbent was not expected to lose the election, which was therefore not expected to be free and fair, the 2016 election was on this premise a 'foregone conclusion.' Bareebe further asserts that most African elections serve to recycle political elites.

With incumbent Museveni declared winner of the 2016 presidential elections, Oloka-Onyango (2017: 118) rightly predicted that this was to be followed by lifting of the constitutional age-limit. With the term limit already out of the way as discussed above, the presidential age-limit was the only remaining obstacle for the incumbent to contest in subsequent elections. In December 2018, Oloka-Onyango's prediction came to pass. During a contested and chaotic parliamentary session, members of the opposition tried to disrupt the proceedings in the hope that they would succeed in blocking the tabling of a motion that was to lift the presidential age-limit. Nonetheless, 317 (77%) members of Uganda's parliament out of the 410 for the day, agreed to the lifting of the

controversial age limit and passed the bill (Ndyasiima, 2018). It is important to note that the ruling NRM has the majority representation in parliament. The bill sought to remove the constitutional age limit of 75 for presidency. By 2021 when Uganda is expected to go to the polls again, President Museveni will be 77 years old and therefore not eligible to stand, minus changing this constitutional provision. The bill was widely perceived to have been crafted for the benefit of President Museveni, who was now set to run for life presidency. President Museveni hailed those who passed this bill and referred to them as the ‘new breed of party historicals’. Ndyasiima (2018) further notes that the president described all those against the age limit amendment as “uninformed evil schemers who do not want Uganda and Africa to succeed”.

Uganda’s media history and public participation in political debate

Picking up from the tumultuous political history discussed above especially up until the NRM captured power in 1986, it is hardly surprising that the country’s media history is equally turbulent. A discussion on Uganda’s media history would therefore be insufficient without highlighting how the media and its development was either affected or enabled by the successive historical periods. This section discusses some of the crucial times in the country’s media history, relating them to whether the readers or the audience was gradually able to participate in political debate or not.

The press under Christianity

It is said that one of the Kings of Buganda, Kabaka Mutesa 1, wrote a letter requesting for Christian missionaries to come to his Kingdom and preach Christianity. But this assertion is contested with the argument that the letter could have been initiated by Henry Morton Stanley, a British explorer, and that therefore a substantial section of its content was his (Karugire, 1980: 51). This argument is anchored in the vested interests that the British had in establishing colonial rule in Uganda, as was the case elsewhere on the African continent.

Consequently, Alexander Mackay a missionary with the Church Missionary Society came to Uganda in 1878. He carried with him a printing press. With this printing press, Mackay printed

simple words in one of the local languages, *Luganda*, to introduce literacy and help people learn how to read and write. He would later use the same equipment to translate the prayer book (Sekeba, 2017: 27-28). Literacy started taking shape. The Church Missionary Society, coming from Britain, started a mimeograph English language quarterly in 1897, which Jacob Matovu (1990:342) describes as a precursor to the country's print media. Understandably, the first publications were oriented towards the Christian faith, which the missionaries came to advance.

In 1900, the monthly English publications titled *Mengo Notes* were published by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), and according to Gariyo (1992:6-7) marked the first newsletters in Uganda. *Mengo Notes* was published in English. Sekeba (2017:29) agrees and adds that this newspaper's content focused on giving details about the activities of the Church Missionary Society in the country. Additional content related to major events happening in Uganda at the time, to help the missionaries in England keep abreast. In 1902, this publication's name was revised to *Uganda Notes*. This change in name was more reflective of the entire country as opposed to its previous name, which is of a kingdom in the central region.

But it was not until almost 30 years later in 1930 that Africans were allowed the chance to have their opinions published in this newspaper. This, as further noted by Sekeba (2017:31-32) constituted a breakthrough for many who had longed to use this medium for such a purpose. The published opinions were of a general nature, discussing topics such as 'The ideal Uganda,' 'How I would help my people if I were a Chief,' and 'Why I am a Christian.' Although these opinions were not of a political nature, they arguably made the local population realise that the media could be used as platform for voicing views on key issues. This was important for the country's struggle for self-governance and a free press in subsequent years.

In 1907, *Ebifa mu Buganda*, the first Luganda newspaper was started. It had an initial circulation of 400 copies, which had grown to 1,300 by 1915 (Sekeba, 2017:32, 34). Gariyo (1992) notes that this publication became *Ebifa mu Uganda* in 1934. And in the late 1950s, it further transformed into an English publication, *New Day*. Sekeba (2017: 39-40) observes that unlike previous publications, *New Day* got involved in writing about political news and issues, to the disapproval of the Church authorities. When the editor of the newspaper failed to comply with

the need for eliminating these controversial issues, the paper was closed down in 1971. It would take another six years (1976) for a monthly English tabloid, *New Century*, to be launched. It can be argued that the aforementioned action of closing down the newspaper set precedent that authorities can exercise maximum power and control over the press in Uganda, at the expense of freedom of speech and expression. This trend was to be replicated in several years to come.

Alongside the activities and publications of the Church Missionary Society were those of the Roman Catholic White Fathers. This group arrived in Uganda in 1879 and started a *Luganda* monthly religious newsletter known as *Munno* in 1911 (Gariyo, 1992). This publication later became a daily, circulating 6,000 copies. Other publications by the Roman Catholic White Fathers included *Enyonyozi Yaitu* which was in the Runyoro/Rutooro languages, *Musizi* in Luganda and *Leadership* in English (Sekeba, 2017: 45). The decision to translate these Christian teachings into the local languages was to ensure that the content is clearly understood. The acceptance of Christian teachings prepared the population for colonialism (Chibita and Fourie, 2007:4). But it was not long before a vibrant local press owned by Ugandans joined the scene. With this press, more voices and narratives from the local population were accommodated.

Onset of the black press: The voice of citizens comes to life

The lethal events of the First World War were partly responsible for the vibrant emergence of an African press in Uganda. One year after this war, the first political publication, known as *Sekanyolya*, was started. Several other titles, such as *Matalisi* of 1923, and *Gambuze* in 1927 followed in succession (Sekeba, 2017:62). In the local press, citizens questioned the logic of colonialism. Some of their inquiry was partly helped by exposure through education, travel and interaction with other African people (Gariyo 1992). In the 1940s, more titles of the local press, such as *Buganda Nyaffe*, *Mugobansonga*, *Munyonyozi* and *Uganda Star* came on board. Gariyo further notes that these publications questioned the logic of British rule and the concept of colonial administration. Nonetheless a few of them were focused on advocating for the business interests of their owners, which Gariyo (1992) describes as being narrow in scope. Expectedly, under colonial rule, the press was controlled through legislation which was restrictive in nature. Some of the laws included the newspaper surety ordinance of 1910 and the Press World War I

ensorship ordinance of 1915. These laws provided for financial penalties to those who defaulted. In addition, the option of imprisonment especially for publishing about British troops or for failure to pay bond before publishing was another option for punishment (Gariyo, 1993: 4). Whereas the black press had not yet fully matured in 1910, the colonial administration found it necessary to have such legislation in place to control the publication of anti-war propaganda (Gariyo 1993: 5).

In 1953, the Kabaka (King) of Buganda among other things demanded for Uganda's independence. With this demand came the insistence that the issues concerning his kingdom, Buganda, be handled by the colonial office and not the Foreign office, and that there should be no East African federation. Chibita and Fourie (2007:11) describe some of these demands, such as the rejection of the formation of an East African Federation, as a demonstration of Buganda's fear to lose autonomy. In response, on 30 November 1953, Sir Andrew Cohen, the colonial governor, deposed Kabaka Edward Muteesa into exile in Britain (Gariyo, 1992: 40- 41). But the decision had an unexpected outcome of enhancing the call for independence from the British. The voice of the local population in the black press through editorials and commentaries was evident. *Uganda Post*, *Uganda Empya*, and *Uganda Eyogera* condemned the exile and treated it as a national issue. The locals engaged in violent protests and negotiations for the Kabaka's return. In addition, Buganda refused to participate in discussions about independence until the demand for the return of the Kabaka was met (Chibita and Fourie, 2007:11). In October 1955, the Kabaka was returned from exile. This was arguably a sign of victory on the part of the masses, as partially enabled through the press.

The action of the masses speaking out and contesting government decisions through the press was to be replicated for several years to come including to-date, as is argued in this thesis. But such freedom of expression did not go unabated. Repressive laws such as the press censorship and correction ordinance No. 13 of 1948, and sections 48 and 53 of the Penal Code on sedition and seditious publications were applied to censor the press. This censorship was at its height during the second World War. It targeted the opinions and commentary from a growing breed of nationalist leaders. Some of these leaders had been exposed to the outside world and repeatedly opposed the indiscriminate recruitment of Africans to fight in the war. By the time of Uganda's

independence in 1962, a few newspapers such as *Uganda Eyogera* and *Munno* were still in circulation (Gariyo, 1992: 70). Other newspaper titles had been closed down and their critical staff, such as journalists, detained. This detention was partly because some of these journalists were allegedly nationalist politicians and as such, their reporting was inclined towards the call for independence (Ocitti, 2005: 27).

The press at Independence

The first years after independence are said to have been of great press freedom in Uganda. This is because of the increase in newspaper circulation to 76,900 for both dailies and non-dailies, a figure that made Uganda arguably one of the biggest print media consumers in the region by 1966 (Ocitti 1980:39). As observed by Tetey (2001: 9-11), the emergence of private media makes it possible for citizens to challenge and criticise authoritarian rule since voices that are initially unheard on state-owned media can now come to the fore. He argues further that it is mainly through the ability to talk-back on private media that the population is able to measure the actions of politicians against what they promised to do, and then decide if such persons need to be allowed to continue holding public office. Consequently, the possibility of being exposed makes government officials circumspect in both their actions and promises.

But for the case of Uganda, it was not long that the press began to be dominated by content about activities of the head of state and other government officials in what Chibita and Fourie (2007:14) describe as a guise of national consolidation that further weakened private media. The country was under Milton Obote as Prime Minister. He was to later replaced the office of the prime minister with that of president, with him as its first head of state (Ocitti 2005:36). Tabaire (2007:194) agrees with Chibita and Fourie (2007), and observes that under President Milton Obote 1, Uganda witnessed real struggles for press freedom. This was despite the fact that his government was considered one of liberal attitudes toward the press.

But perhaps Ocitti (2005:28-31) analyses this situation better with the explanation that government perceived the role of the press as one of a development approach. In this approach, the press was expected to assist the government in its development agenda towards national

cohesion. On the contrary however, the press took on a libertarian model. Such a model allowed for alternative views minus state interference. These two approaches were therefore bound to be antagonistic as government used its machinery to try and make the press comply. Ocitti (2005:32-33) further observes that with time, President Milton Obote opted to have his own press that would report affairs in the interest of the state. He consequently increased the government newspapers circulated in local languages and allowed for more local language programming on radio. In addition, he had a special press- the Uganda Press, set up to report on the activities of his political party, the UPC.

Nonetheless, Pike (2019:158) observes that under President Obote, the government newspaper known as *Uganda Times* collapsed gradually as readers chose to keep off the propaganda that filled its pages. Some of such content misrepresented the crisis that was happening in the country at the time and presented it all as a stable situation. The reaction by President Obote was to invest more funds in an attempt to redeem the plummeting sales, as opposed to addressing the issue of lopsided content and an unpopular newspaper. For example, 1.9 million dollars worth of printing machinery was procured from the Soviet Union in 1985, only to be dumped and waste away in the elephant grass at President Obote's compound in Apac district.

Upon President Obote's deposition by President Idi Amin Dada, the press still faced restrictions. The Newspapers and Publications Decree of 1972 in a way meant that the press resorted to what Chibita and Fourie (2007:18) term as doing public relations for the state. The decree further gave the government information minister powers to prohibit the publication of a newspaper for an unspecified period. Consequently, most media became inactive or closed business. In an analysis of this period, Tabaire (2007:194) observes that the government of President Idi Amin killed journalists and nationalised newspapers. This limited the role that the media could play in the country's political life. Tabaire further observes that this situation did not improve when President Obote II returned to power. Journalists were detained and critical newspapers banned. He concludes that the press was expected to offer constructive criticism, although the description of such criticism was not availed Tabaire (2007:195).

Radio and Television broadcasting in Uganda

In 1954, radio broadcasting was introduced in Uganda mainly to serve as an extension of advanced colonial administration. With the above heightened anti-government propaganda in the print media, radio was a preserve of government propaganda, which included replicating what was aired on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) radio (Gariyo, 1993:42-43). Gariyo further notes that some of the privileges availed to natives working with the radio station, blinded them from questioning the absence of local programming. At this point in Uganda's media history therefore, the voice of citizens through local broadcasts was still far from being realised.

Almost a decade later, on 8 October 1963, the country established UTV (Uganda Television), with a focus on expanding national development. This was under President Milton Obote. The television's programming included drama, documentary, sports, talk shows and daily news both in English and local languages (Ocitti, 2005:32). Consequently, more than half of the time on television was devoted to educational programmes as determined by government. The country had over 9,000 television sets by 1968. Transmitter stations had been activated in different parts of the country such as Mbale, Soroti, Lira, Masaka and Mbarara, consequently expanding the television audience and consequently improved local programming (Ocitti, 2005:39).

But it was not until 1971, under President Amin, that the impact of television was felt more by a bigger section of the population. This was due to the larger volumes of investment towards developing the television industry and the shift from black and white to colour telecasting (Matovu, 1990:354). Expectedly, television, just like radio, was still under state control. The ordinary person was seen to participate in politically neutral programmes such as music and agriculture (Chibita and Fourie, 2007:18). Radio Uganda and Uganda Television remained the only players in the broadcast sector, and it was a criminal offence to be found listening to a foreign radio station such as the BBC. Consequently, in the period 1971-1986, the ability of Ugandans to participate in public debate on their governance was eroded (Chibita and Fourie, 2007).

The modern era of Radio in Uganda

In 1993, Uganda's mediascape changed when the airwaves were liberalised. This saw the first privately owned radio station, Sanyu FM, join the airwaves (Chibita and Kibombo, 2013:1) of what continues to be a growing media scape that has attracted media conglomerates such as the Vision Group and the Nation Media Group. The country now has 250 registered radio stations and over 30 television stations, which have been critical in the broadening of space for political debate (Sekeba, 2017:198). Most of these stations broadcast in indigenous languages (Ipsos Connect Audience Research, 2017).

With the liberalisation of airwaves came an unprecedented proliferation of radio talk shows in Uganda (Benderana *et al.*, 2010: 13). This genre, commonly known as *ebimeeza*, meaning 'table-talks,' in one of the local dialects – *Luganda* -became a meeting point for ordinary people to exchange views on various issues, especially on the country's political discourse. The *ebimeeza* were in a way now the public sphere, allowing for free expression of views and various forms of participation. As noted by Nassanga (2008:654), the phone-in talk shows on *ebimeeza* allowed the public to actively participate in agenda setting. Prior to the *ebimeeza* the 'Capital Gang' was Uganda's first participatory political talk show (Chibita, 2010:8). The show had a host with four regular guests known as the 'gangsters.' Listeners were free to call in to contribute to the on-going discussion. It was not long before other radio stations initiated similar programmes. The popularity of such shows gained momentum, with some stations having them daily. Chibita (2010) adds that it is the introduction of *ebimeeza* that took the genre of radio talk shows a notch higher in Uganda. These shows were a rallying point for diversity in opinion on the pressing socio-political issues in the country. In addition, the participants abided to certain ground rules and guidelines of engagement to minimise personal attacks and likely incidences of libel against the media house.

The *ebimeeza* were at their peak between 2001-2009 (Brisset-Foucault, 2013:228-229) and were arguably a cherished public sphere. They mainly took place over the weekend and were held in places accessible to all, such as public houses, public gardens or open courtyards scattered around the city. These talks were also broadcast live on private radio stations. Most of them lasted

between one to two hours, with the big ones attracting an audience of about 600 to 800 people onsite and the smaller ones a gathering of 20 to 30 persons. Brisset-Foucault adds that the format of these *ebimeeza* was similar. The speakers identified to contribute to the debate were voluntary and registered on a list prepared before the broadcast debate. A chairperson, appointed by the radio station, would then call on each of the speakers to give their views on a salient issue of the day. Chibita (2010:8) further observes that a significant section of the public that had initially been closed out on engaging in talk shows mainly because such shows were broadcast in the English language, were now able to take part. The fact that the *ebimeeza* were now held in a variety of indigenous languages not only allowed for more participation of the local audience but arguably meant that issues could be better understood.

Then in a dramatic turn of events in 2009, the government of Uganda clamped down on the *ebimeeza* radio talk shows, arguing that they were inciting violence (Benderana *et al.*, 2010:14). Radio stations were consequently threatened with non-renewal of their broadcasting licenses if they dared carry on with the talk shows that were allegedly inciting the public. The radio stations had to abide and this consequently affected the hitherto vibrant public sphere. With the *ebimeeza* talk shows now abolished, gaps in public discourse in relation to feedback and free debate were evident. The public was now left with expressing their views mainly through the ‘letters to the editor’ section and commentary in newspapers, a few talk shows on television stations or phone calls and messaging for broadcasts (Benderana *et al.*, 2010:15). To Nassanga (2008:657), the government of Uganda is yet to fully accept media as a public sphere and therefore allow it to operate with fewer restrictions. This non-acceptance, Nassanga argues further, is reminiscent of the fact that government had full control over the media before the era of media pluralism and is therefore arguably still operating in that mode. And as such, the *ebimeeza* were largely viewed by government as a platform for creating public disaffection, promoting tribalism and creating confusion among the public. As noted by Wandera (2016), several media houses in Uganda remain oppressed by the state and this limits their role of independently informing the public. The *ebimeeza* remain banned to date and, as will be argued in this thesis, the stifling of Uganda’s public sphere has now been extended to social media.

For the broadcast media, the audience is mainly left with television talk shows, most of which take place in a studio setting, where one or two moderators discusses a topical issue with panellists or experts invited to the show. The audience is allowed to participate by way of phone calls or by the more recent engagement on social media. The show host can only take a few phone calls within the specified period of the talk show. Panellists are then asked to respond to some of the inquiries or the input from the audience. The majority of these talk shows are in English, with only a few in the local languages, specifically *Luganda*. Some of the current ones, as of this writing, include *On the spot* and *Fourth Estate* on NTV (English), *Frontline* and *One on one with Tamale Mirundi* on NBS (English), *The Eagle* also on NBS but in *Luganda*. Another is *Amaaso ku Ggwanga* on BBS Television (*Luganda*). Although most of these are held in a studio setting, television stations are beginning to turn to open spaces for audience talk shows, arguably to allow more physical participation of the citizens. In this category are shows such as ‘Perspectives with Josephine Karungi’ on NTV. It is a new development in Uganda for television talk shows to be held in open spaces, as was the case for the defunct radio talks. It should be noted however that the current open-space-based television talk shows are not political in nature, but rather address social concerns.

Whereas the radio talk shows were live on air and therefore limited in terms of time allocation, they had the additional component of a live audience. This audience would cheer or react in various ways in support of or against what a particular speaker submitted. This live audience arguably made the radio talks shows more engaging and added to their popularity. Perhaps this explains the fact that the physical venues in which these radio talk shows were held attracted a high turn-up to the extent of being oversubscribed. The narrow studio-set up of most radio stations could not have accommodated such big audiences, therefore necessitating radio managers to find alternative space.

The press under President Museveni and the NRM

The mistreatment of the press before the NRM took over power in Uganda made this party’s initial policy towards the press distinctively different and arguably better in comparison to previous regimes. Sekeba (2017:197-198) observes that the NRM was more tolerant to the press

and allowed criticism of the government even within the state's own newspaper, *The New Vision*. A few years later however, the government realised the need to regulate the press and came up with several policies towards this (Sekeba, 2017:199). Some of these include the Press and Journalist Statute, the Uganda Communications Commission Act, and the Interception of Communications Act, all of which have had the effect of self-censorship towards the press. Tabaire (2007:194) agrees with Sekeba that the press in Uganda has been forced to self-censor. This has been achieved through several strategies designed to intimidate journalists and the press. Synonymous with previous regimes, the press has attempted to challenge some of these instruments or the provisions therein.

A major success for the press in Uganda in this struggle against repressive laws was the final court ruling of 2004 that nullified a provision about publication of false news (Tabaire, 2007:193). This provision that was initially contained in Section 50 of the Ugandan Penal Code (Cap. 120) had outlawed the publication of content that could be interpreted as false news. The provision sought to criminalise publication of false statements, rumours or reports that were interpreted to carry the likelihood of causing fear and alarm to the public. The penalty for offenders was imprisonment for periods of up to two years. Tabaire (2007) notes further that a team of journalists who had been arraigned before court under this provision successfully challenged its intentions. The court ruled that this particular provision was subject to misinterpretation and abuse on political grounds. Other strategies to stifle the press have included policies denying it advertisements from government, as was the case with *The Daily Monitor* newspaper in 1993. This newspaper, viewed by government as an opposition newspaper, lost 70% of its advertising revenue as a result of this policy, which was not reversed until four years later in 1997 (Tabaire, 2007:194).

A more recent government directive issued in May 2019, targeting the broadcast media in Uganda, came from UCC (Uganda Communications Commission). It required several television and radio stations to dismiss their staff. In the directive, UCC ordered the immediate suspension of 39 persons including producers, heads of programming and heads of news. These media personnel were spread across 13 media houses. The affected television stations included NTV, NBS TV, BBS TV, Bukedde TV, Kingdom TV and Salt TV. The affected radio stations included

Akaboozi, Beat FM, Capital FM, Pearl FM, Sapientia FM and Radio Simba. The country's communications authority alleged that these media houses and subsequently the aforementioned personnel had violated the 'minimum broadcasting standards.' This was in relation to the coverage of Police's violent arrest of an opposition member of Parliament, Hon. Robert Kyagulanyi. The directive, which coincided with celebrations of the World Press Freedom Day, was condemned by members of parliament and other media bodies. It was described as a demonstration of Uganda's return to application of draconian laws in limiting press freedoms and a continued shrinking of media space (Kahungu, 2019).⁴ In response, the government's minister of state in charge of urban development advised the affected persons to have this matter resolved in the courts of law, arguing that UCC ought to be allowed to carry out its mandate (Sekanjako, 2019). As observed and rightly predicted by Tabaire (2007: 205), for the most part that President Museveni has been in power, cases of harassment of the media continue to be reported.

Social media in Uganda

Uganda's Internet history dates to 1991 when Makerere University was linked to universities in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe through Fidonet technology (McKonnell, 1998:152). The country currently has a number of Internet service providers targeting different markets, but as noted by Ndiwalana and Tusubira (2012:13), the major mobile telephone operators, such as MTN, Airtel and Africell, have now focused on Internet and data services as a way of luring additional customers. A 2016 report by ACME (African Centre for Media Excellence that monitored the media coverage of the 2016 elections approximates the number of Internet users in Uganda to be 13 million (ACME, 2016: 27-28). Ugandans use the Internet for several reasons, including engaging on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The onset of social media in Uganda brings another dimension to the discussion of free debate in the public sphere, with Lim (2009:69) hailing it as a new form of the public sphere.

⁴<https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/MPs-task-government-explain-UCC-orders-on-journalists/688334-5098240-s5omudz/index.html>

Ugandans use social media as a tool for the free expression of views on the country's political discourse. Kanyoro (2015) observes that Ugandans use social media to practice citizen journalism and this consequently lessens the need for updates from mainstream media. Nonetheless, the ordinary people have sometimes used social media in Uganda to circulate falsehoods. Consequently, some of the trusted and leading social media accounts in the country are those belonging to traditional media houses although this maintains the framing of the dominant narrative, that social media is otherwise meant to challenge (Kalinaki, 2016). On the other hand, Uganda's mainstream media have not been slow to adapt to and to adopt social media either, with many of them allowing for interactivity on their platforms through social media. The adoption of social media by media houses and other entities was more sharply seen during Uganda's February 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections (Rugambwa and Messerschmidt 2015:2). As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the use of social media during elections was so heightened that it sparked off closure of these platforms, owing to the overwhelming comments against several government actions in relation to the elections. Social media has been used and continues to be used by traditional media as a source of information for stories, as well as platforms where feedback is solicited from the audience (Broersma and Graham, 2012: 407).

Synthesis of engagement by citizens in Uganda

This chapter has demonstrated that for the most part of Uganda's history, and even in the current times, both the press and citizens have had to struggle for their inherent freedom of speech and expression. During colonial rule, the African press presented successive popular grievances (Gariyo, 1992:7). These were directed at both the colonial government and the Buganda establishment. The successive governments that took over after independence have not been very tolerant of the press and have consequently stifled citizens' voices. The relationship between the state and the media has as a result been a tense one and continues to be tense. Government controls over the press have been in relation to what the press publishes or airs and the pre-supposed anti-government reaction of such content on the audience. Citizens have also made use of the press to agitate for better governance. As earlier seen under the regime of Obote II, some newspapers were banned for not offering constructive criticism (Tabaire, 2007:195). The latest

attempt at controlling the press under President Museveni has seen the broadcast media accused of violating minimum broadcasting standards (Kahungu, 2019).

Arguably the government in all these incidences intends that the press reflects a positive image of state actions even where these actions are contrary to basic observation of human rights or where they are against the ethical considerations of the press. In the past, for example under the Newspapers and Publications Decree of 1972 of President Amin, the government succeeded at achieving this and making the press resort to doing government's public relations (Chibita and Fourie, 2007:18). But as noted by Tabaire (2007:204) the approach of the press under President Museveni and the NRM has been one of countering and resisting such manipulation. This has been done partly through the courts of law in an attempt, sometimes successfully, to protect press freedoms. It can be concluded that in this exchange of communication between the press and government, the press has been both a victim of state control but also a source of power in relaying voices of citizens. It is with this hindsight that this study seeks to investigate the social media content of the press and how citizens reacted to this content in the period of the 2016 elections.

Research problem

On 18 and 19 February 2016, Ugandans went to the polls to elect the next president who was to lead the country for a constitutional five years. In the build-up to the elections, the country witnessed an unprecedented increase in use of social media by media houses and citizens alike. Even the presidential candidates ran their own social media campaigns alongside other fora. Presidential candidate and former Prime Minister John Patrick Amama Mbabazi took the lead by declaring his presidential bid in a YouTube video in mid-June 2016 (Rugambwa and Messerschmidt, 2015; Oloka-Onyango, 2017). For the first time in the country's history, a televised debate streamed on the Facebook and Twitter pages of local television stations, and attracted full participation of all presidential candidates including the incumbent, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.

NTV, one of the top television stations in terms of viewership (Ipsos Connect Audience Research Quarter 4, 2017), maintained an active Facebook page with news updates of the election preparations and proceedings throughout the campaign period. Followers of the television station often posted their views on this page, in reaction to the news content shared about the approaching elections. In this milieu of activity, the stage was set for the 2016 polls, with social media pages of media houses and politicians bustling with activity. On polling day however, the government of Uganda, in a dramatic intervention, directed telecom companies to shut down all social media as well as the Internet in general. The reason cited by government was an apparent threat to public order and safety posed by social media platforms (Musisi, 2016). Although this clamp down was condemned by human rights activists as a blatant violation of fundamental rights to freedom of expression, the incumbent- Yoweri Museveni, explained that it was a necessary security measure to avert lies (Abrahamsen and Bareebe, 2016:755). This clampdown, according to Gumede (2016:416) meant that many Ugandans could neither use Facebook nor Twitter. By implication and in relation to this study, the clampdown meant that activity on the aforementioned NTV Facebook page was affected. This study sets out to examine the nature of engagement on the NTV Facebook page during elections, with a view of establishing whether this engagement posed a threat to public order and safety as alleged by the state. It should be noted that for the period of the shutdown, some citizens still managed to bypass the blockade through virtual private networks (Kalinaki, 2016). The government of Uganda has been in the habit of instituting both direct and indirect controls against the media during national elections. Such control, according to Mugumya (2017: 332), owes to the fact that the media has been known to have influence over the electoral decisions of voters. Mugumya argues further that it is for this influence that social media including Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter were shut down at the peak of the electoral season. The ban on social media was lifted after the elections.

But prior to the clampdown on social media, the country had witnessed state-limitations to public gatherings in public spaces, especially where such gatherings were anticipated to be of a political nature (Kalinaki, 2016). Such spaces would otherwise have been used for mobilising protesters. To Kalinaki (2016), the fact that both physical space and online platforms were constrained

resulted in the inability for Ugandans to successfully mobilise and cause regime change, as was the case in other African countries such as Egypt and Tunisia.

As observed by Velenzuela (2013: 920), Facebook, similar to other social media, can be used to cause collective action even beyond borders, through the exchange of information and news not available in other media. The implication of this, argues Gumede (2016: 414), is that social media and the Internet have given ordinary people in Africa greater a voice and direct engagement in civic matters. Expectedly, authoritarian governments and pseudo-democratic ones have reacted and continue to react by censoring such social media platforms.

Motivation for the study

This study comes at a time when the government of Uganda has chosen to tax social media, with the country's president describing the engagements on social media platforms as '*olugambo*' (gossip). The tax took effect on 1 July 2018, leaving many Ugandans unable to access social media platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Google Hangouts, YouTube and Skype (Kimuyu, 2018). The tax is enshrined in the new excise duty amendments passed by the country's parliament in June 2018 and requires users to pay a daily sum of UGX (Uganda shillings) 200 before they can access social media platforms. Scholars have argued that social media have opened new possibilities for debate and interaction; have become coordinating tools for several political processes and could be harnessed. Nonetheless, governments increasingly attempt to limit access to social media (Newman, 2010; Clay Shirky, 2011; Gumede, 2016). Such limitations are sometimes effected through ensuring that state-owned companies are directly in charge of social media. Where such platforms are privately owned, non-compliance to state directives may result in revoking trading licences (Gumede, 2016: 415). From this argument, it is less surprising that telecommunication companies effected the shut down in Uganda as directed by government. Therefore, the researcher finds this topic timely in contributing to the growing body of knowledge in the context of social media regulation in Uganda and by extension, elsewhere on the continent.

Aim of the study

The study aims at examining the nature of engagement on Facebook as a public sphere, and its implications on media and power struggles in the digital age.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to ignite debate on social media regulation in Uganda vis-à-vis the constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression. In addition to growing the body of knowledge on social media and its role in political activities, the study will contribute to theorising of the notion of the online public sphere from an African context. This will be achieved by analysing the diverse 2016-electoral-related conversation on the NTV Facebook page, which herein is regarded as a public sphere.

By analysing how followers engage with content from mainstream television on social media, the study seeks an understanding of who is in control of the online conversation when citizens, the media and government converge on the same Facebook page.

Research objectives

The overall objective of this study is to analyse the political discourse on Facebook as a public sphere. The specific objectives can be broken down as:

1. To determine how Nation Television used Facebook in engaging followers on the political discourse during Uganda's 2016 elections.
2. To examine the nature of engagement on Facebook as a public sphere.
3. To establish the ways in which television media and institutions of government interfere with public participation on Facebook.

Research questions

The following are the main research questions to be tackled:

1. How did Nation Television use Facebook in engaging followers on the political discourse in Uganda during the 2016 presidential elections?
2. What is the nature of engagement on Facebook as a public sphere?
3. In what ways do television media and institutions of government interfere with public participation on Facebook?

Definition of terms

Social media as applied in this study refers to a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of web 2.0. They consequently allow for creation and exchange of user-generated content, as explained by Dijk and Bell (2013: 5), who add that Facebook is one of the common social networking sites.

Followers, as applied in this study are the ordinary people who ‘subscribe’ to the NTV Facebook page. Whereas other entities such as government and the media can also be referred to as followers if they subscribe to the page, the use of this term is purposefully in reference to the ordinary people, particularly the citizens of Uganda. The ensuing discussion makes reference to followers, the media and the state.

Engagement as applied in this study refers to: i) the action of posting content (text) on Facebook by the media house, and ii) the reaction to this content by way of text from Facebook followers. Engagement excludes the Facebook likes, shares, use of images, graphics or videos as explained in the study’s scope.

Structure of the dissertation

This study contains eight chapters. Chapter one has introduced the study and placed it within the appropriate background of Uganda’s media history to contemporary times. Chapter two surveys relevant literature around the study. This includes literature on the global, regional and national use of Facebook and other social media platforms in general. The application or use of such platforms is contextualised to the media, citizens/followers and other interest groups. The literature further explores the regulatory frameworks to control use of social media in Uganda

and the implications of this on the notion of free debate in the public sphere. Chapter three grounds the study in two theories: the theory of the public sphere and the agenda setting theory. It traces the origins of these theories to contemporary debates about them. It makes particular reference to the relevance of these theories to the study. The fourth chapter highlights the study's methodology. It situates use of social media in online ethnography or netnography, and combines this with in-depth interviews for data collection. The chapter premises on a constructivist research paradigm. Chapters five to seven present and discuss the research findings accruing to the study objectives. These are discussed as informed by both the literature review and theoretical framework. In Chapter eight, the study concludes with suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2 Literature review

Introduction

This chapter brings forth the literature relevant to the study for purposes of proper contextualisation. It traces the idea of citizen participation in news by way of commenting on news content, and makes a connection to the current ability of such citizens to co-produce news and other content on social media. This ability consequently puts traditional media in a state of panic since they are no longer the sole custodians of information or news updates. The engagement of citizens on social media is further presented as a catalyst for these platforms to be used by politicians in several political processes including elections, to enable such politicians easily dialogue with the citizens or electorate. The chapter then delves into the use of Facebook in Uganda, where it is the most popular social media platform.

Citizen engagement in news media

The provision for citizens to engage with content published in the newspapers can be traced to early eighteenth-century Britain. Alfred Hermida (2011:13-14) narrates how in this century, citizens were allowed to provide feedback on published newspaper content. A space, dedicated to such feedback, was availed on the third page of newspapers interested in this engagement with their readers. In addition, such newspapers availed a blank fourth page for the paper to be folded

and addressed as any other ordinary letter. This trend later developed into the current published 'letter to the editor' in many of the contemporary newspapers.

One hundred and fifty years later, as part of the dramatic changes in the twentieth century, the world witnessed the beginning of a new era of communication, namely, television broadcasting. Television picked up from the success of radio broadcasting, which in Britain and South America dates back to the 1920s. As noted by Cushion (2012: 38), the success of radio sales in the 1930s inspired companies in the United States and the United Kingdom to invest in the newly invented television, particularly in New York and London. But owing to the success and dominance of newspapers, television news did not have an easy start. Cox (1995:2) recalls that as part of this competition between television and newspapers, the newspaper industry put limitations on the use of airwaves for provision of news at particular times of the day. These were the times or hours that were deemed injurious to newspaper sales. In Britain, the BBC agreed to an arrangement not to broadcast news before 7 o'clock in the evening. In addition, BBC was to solicit its news from established news agencies as opposed to filing its own sourced stories. Nonetheless, the start of World War II in 1939 removed this impediment for good as the BBC filed its own stories. Television news took centre stage and arguably remains the most viewed, valued and trusted source of information for several activities (Cushion, 2012:1- 4).

Television journalism is said to connect more compellingly with audiences, perhaps due to the visual impact of the moving picture. In discussing television news, Cushion (2012) further argues that such news still tends to retain special significance even in incidences where the independence of news media has been interfered with. Television too engages citizens in current affairs programming. Such engagement has involved allowing audiences to participate in periodic debates and talk shows on social and political issues, with a consequence of contributing to dialogue in the public sphere (Bignell, 2004:19-20). Talk shows, for instance, allow for interaction with experts brought in to give specialist opinion, and usually have a studio audience in attendance allowed to comment, or a viewing audience to phone in and contribute to the discussion (Bignell, 2004:265-266). Nonetheless, Cushion (2012:2-5) cautions that whereas television has for long commanded the audiences, the onset of social media and its undeniably swelling numbers has brought a new dimension to this perspective, consequently necessitating a

change in the 'narrative of the future'. Dwyer (2010:2-3) had earlier noted that television audiences and subsequently advertising revenues were on a decline, a fact to possibly explain why traditional media have opted to expand into the online sphere.

Consequently, the spotlight has been turned to media convergence, calling for what Dwyer (2010) describes as journalists with multimedia expertise. Such journalists are able to combine a host of skills in packaging news content and other current affairs. In this environment of digital storytelling, a combination of visual, audio, graphics, and web design make for a complete package, as new technologies combine or converge with traditional ones. Dwyer (2010) further argues that media owners prefer convergence since it arguably allows for expansion of output. Such owners hope to reap from the benefits of the economies of scale as they continuously acquire, co-opt or merge and improve ways of doing business. Dwyer (2010: 9, 14) further discusses levels of convergence as industrial convergence, which relates to industry consolidation and sector cross-ownership, and to the prevailing ideological and policy framings that underwrite it. Next is technological convergence as depicted by the multimedia nature of new media, whose delivery is via domestic television sets, laptop computers and the personal mobile phone screens. Finally, there is the regulatory convergence which has necessitated changes in the policies developed for media regulation to eliminate the regulation of each media as a separate entity. In this multimedia environment, Dwyer advocates for convergent regulatory services to oversee the broadcasting, telecommunications and radio communication industries.

But whereas the industries have been accommodative of convergence, Cushion (2012: 28) points out that an analysis of such convergence ought to be cognisant of the impact on employees. For television newsrooms, convergence has meant the stretching of staff time and resources amidst the fact that these additional demands have not been matched with additional pay. To Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009:568) the entire concept of online news has increased the pressure on journalists, who are now required to combine news-gathering and story-telling techniques in different media formats. Looking at television, Cushion (2012: 27) observes that television journalism has integrated the salient features of the Internet and consequently become a more integrated online service through interactive websites or social media platforms such as Facebook.

From this integrative perspective, Cushion (2012) advocates for a co-adaptation of both television and the Internet, which he describes as progressive. This suggestion is arguably informed by the fact that not only are audiences increasingly going online for their information and socialising needs, but by what Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009: 573-574) argue is a “dialogical journalism.” In the online or Internet space, news production is largely a collective endeavour between the media and citizens, each informing the other’s processes. But Mitchelstein and Boczkowski further note that since contributions from the online audience are not necessarily guided by established editorial norms, some media houses remain hesitant to allow dialogical journalism.

Ylva Rodny-Gumede (2017: 274) agrees with Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) and notes that social media has become an influential communication and news-breaking tool. This news-breaking has however unleashed onto the public the onslaught of fake news. It can be argued that the unprecedented circulation of fake news and the continuous sharing of information (substantiated or not) is a demonstration of social media ‘power’ in the hands of citizens. Such fake news is sometimes quite carefully crafted and in sync with events happening in a given society at a specific time, that traditional media is compelled to carry the same and run corrections/apologies later. To counter this trend of fake news, Rodny-Gumede observes that journalists have been compelled to produce news at the same rate since audiences can access it through other sources, and so that they retain their place as reliable outlets of quality news (Rodny-Gumede, 2017: 281). The implication of this fast production of news on newsroom practices is that stories can no longer be kept for too long, awaiting the gathering of more facts. Another implication is that newsrooms now grapple with the question of how much latitude to allow journalists to engage on social media. Part of the concern, Rodny-Gumede (2017: 279) continues the argument, is that journalists may risk disclosing personal information or giving opinions as opposed to facts as they engage in the online space.

In addition to the danger of circulating harmful information, Reid (2017: 214) decries the act of online bullying and presence of trolls, both of which usually target female users of social media. Reid equates these acts to online imposition of misogyny and patriarchy. Rodny-Gumede (2017: 273, 277) nonetheless cautions that social media and social networks have not replaced

traditional media and should therefore be seen as complementary. Whereas the scholarly community remains divided on the actual impact that social media has had or continues to have on traditional media, Rodney-Gumede insists that mainstream media has to adapt to new technologies or risk extinction.

The onset of social media

Social media is defined by Miller *et. al* (2016:9) as the “colonisation of the space between traditional broadcast and private communication.” The roots of social media are attributed to the success of Korea’s Cyworld, a platform launched in 1999. Cyworld worked in categories of friendship. To be a Cy-ilchon to someone meant to be a very close friend or relation and it bound one to principles of reciprocity, similar to the Korean kinship system. This linkage to the Korean kinship system is said to have made Cyworld a popular platform but only in Korea because its ability to be replicated elsewhere was not forthcoming. Consequently, it has been replaced by the more-involving and thus far-reaching social media platforms (Miller *et. al.*, 2016: 13). Lester (2014: 48) notes that slightly earlier in 1997, SixDegrees.com came up as a social network site that allowed users to connect to each other and as such, contributed to the upsurge of other social media sites.

Social media further picks up from the foundations of web 2.0, which allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Dijk and Bell, 2013:5). According to Hinton and Hjorth (2013: 16-18), the term web 2.0 was first used by Darcy DiNucci in 1999 but is commonly associated to Tim O’Reilly who popularised the concept. With the onset of web 2.0 came the ability for ordinary users or audiences to produce and distribute content online. It is this ability or power in the hands of citizens that is being used in Uganda today, and which saw the directive by the state to shut down social media. Web 2.0 was in contrast to another term, ‘Web 1.0,’ which was largely perceived to be limiting of the audiences’ ability to produce and widely share information in various formats. With the capabilities brought by Web 2.0, the proliferation of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and user-generated content sites such as YouTube and Flickr, seems to be on the rise and with them a growing number of users (Dijk and Bell, 2013:5).

Before the advancement of the web, the Internet (developed from the late 1960s) was denoted by a series of computers connected to each other and sharing a common data transfer protocol. The web emerged in the early 1990s, as a much-needed interface for people to access Internet resources (Hinton and Larissa, 2013:8). Consequently, several companies invested in the computer industry but became bankrupt, leading to the renowned dot.com crash of the year 2000 (Fuchs, 2014:33). But as early as 1999, catalysts had hinted on the possibility of such a crash, owing to the state of the industry which was at that time oversubscribed. In addition, several companies were over-valued and operated with money from investors (Hinton and Hjorth, 2013:15). Consequently, the market was denoted by low profits despite the massive investment. In the aftermath of this crisis, efforts were made to convince investors to consider new Internet start-ups. This was helped by the conviction that a new and better web 2.0, embedded with high economic and democratic potentials to the masses was worth further investment (Fuchs, 2014: 33).

Use of social media in political processes

The onset of social media and its various platforms, implies that readers can now participate in more of the five news production processes of observation, selection, editing, distribution and interpretation. In addition, these platforms allow users to generate customised content (Hermida 2011). Social media has undoubtedly opened more avenues for communication and participation within the political domain by enhancing the possibilities for more direct and interactive communication between parties, state institutions and citizens on one hand as well as citizens among themselves on the other.

Social media has been used in political processes of several countries to bring about change especially starting off in Tunisia in 2011 and spreading across the Middle East. In Tunisia, the uprisings were sparked off by information shared on social media about the self-immolation of a college graduate, Mohammed Bouazizi (Seib, 2012: 15). This graduate had resorted to selling fruits and vegetables on the streets, after failing to find decent employment. On the fateful day, Bouazizi set himself ablaze consequently igniting the uprisings. Casilli and Tubaro (2012:6) had earlier observed that social media was continuously being used to cause political change. They

highlighted meetings between government officials and representatives from social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Such meetings among other things discussed the need for regulation of these platforms, especially in the aftermath of the 2011 civil unrest in the United Kingdom.

In Egypt, it is widely believed that President Mubarak's regime was intolerant to alternative views and tortured or kidnapped political opponents (Gerbaudo, 2012: 51). Some Egyptians found solace in the 'public sphere' of the several 'ahwa' (coffee) shops in Cairo, Alexandria and other major cities. Other citizens expressed their discontent on social media, especially on Facebook. It was not surprising therefore that Facebook was instrumental in the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt was overthrown mainly because of mobilisation against him on social media, in what Gerbaudo (2012:49) refers to as the popular 'Facebook revolutions', 'Twitter revolutions', or 'wiki-revolutions.' This type of labelling is nonetheless contested by Seib (2012:15) who considers it an insult to the courage exhibited by those who risked their lives in demanding for change across the Middle East.

The height of this dissent in Egypt was sparked off by the street killing of 28-year-old Khaled Said by police officers for allegedly posting online a video showing members of the police force involved in a drug deal (Gerbaudo, 2012:55). A Facebook page opened in his name and other Facebook pages turned out to be the rallying point to mobilise and overthrow the regime. Gerbaudo (2012) contends that only a limited number of people could have been mobilised through social media and therefore the role of traditional media and other channels used in mobilising the bigger population cannot be underestimated. To Seib (2012), the uprisings in several Arab states resulted from a long-held accumulation of discontent in relation to the economic and social welfare of the people. It was only a matter of time therefore, that these people would rise in protest. The ability to use social media to share these grievances heightened calls for collective action.

A similar incident happened in 2001 in the Philippines when citizens were mobilised partly through text messages to turn up in large numbers at a court hearing. This was in relation to an impeachment trial of President Joseph Estrada (Shirky, 2011:28). The Filipinos received

information about a ploy to disregard some of the crucial evidence against the president in court. They then mobilised through a text message saying “Go to EDSA. Wear blk.” The overwhelming crowds at court made the legislators reconsider their decision and allow that the aforementioned evidence be heard. Estrada lost the presidency. Shirky (2011) further refers to similar incidents in Spain in 2014 that led to the ouster of Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar. Another example was Moldova in 2009, when the Communist Party lost power through massive protests coordinated on Facebook, Twitter and text messages.

Velenzuela (2013:925) chronicles the protests that marred Chile in the famous Chilean ‘winter of discontent,’ that were fuelled by social media, especially following the announcement by government in 2011 that Facebook and Twitter conversations were to be monitored. Velenzuela notes that unlike protests elsewhere, the Chilean protest happened amidst strong economic performance. Chile protesters were concerned about social issues such as the state of environmental protection, the education policy and the pace of reconstruction after the 2010 earthquake. This multi-faceted nature of contested issues drew interest from various groups, including high school students.

Several examples can be drawn from Africa as well. Zimbabwe witnessed protests coordinated on the Internet and social media too, over what William Gumede (2016: 414) called the autocratic leadership, mismanagement and corruption of President Robert Mugabe’s government. Hashtags such as #ThisFlag, #ZimbabweShutdown, #ShutDownZim on Facebook and Twitter, in addition to the social messaging service WhatsApp were key in mobilising protests. Nonetheless, Internet penetration remains low in Zimbabwe as noted by Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo (2013: 407), and it is mainly concentrated in the urban centres. In addition, the fear of apprehension has made users publish content under pseudonyms or use social media in a manner that is not for political engagement. The Zimbabwean government has instituted legislation including the Interception of Communication Act, to justify state interference into private communication.

Meanwhile in Nigeria, during the 2011 Nigerian presidential polls, both print and electronic media were active on social media (Adelaja, 2013: 325-326). During these polls, social media was used both in verifying truths related to alleged vote rigging and in inciting violence, in which

an estimated 800 people were killed. It was also through a tweet that the alleged fabrication of results at a private residence by senatorial candidate Kema Chikwe was unveiled, consequently leading to his exposure and subsequent loss of the election to the opponent, Chris Anyawu.

In the case of Uganda, Kalinaki (2016) observes that the leading social media platforms are those associated with media houses. This, he argues, has a disadvantage of maintaining the dominant narrative and framing of issues by the media. Kalinaki adds that social media are a new phenomenon in Uganda, an explanation for the insufficient literature on the subject. Several media houses in Uganda run social media accounts to generate feedback from the audience, especially on current affairs programmes.

It is important to note though, that not all attempts to mobilise masses through social media are successful. As Shirky (2011) notes, sometimes these attempts fail as was the case in Belarus in 2006 when online media protests against President Aleksandr Lukashenko's alleged vote rigging came to nothing. Then in 2009 in Iran, protests relating to the alleged miscount of votes for Mir Hossein Mousavi also produced nothing. Finally, there was the Red Shirt uprising in Thailand in 2010, which led to the killing of dozens of protesters.

In discussing the Facebook and Twitter revolutions, Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009: 575) observe that the inequality in access to online platforms gets in the way of these platforms' potential at civic engagement. Consequently, their potential to facilitate debate and diversity of opinion in the online public sphere is affected. In addition, they argue that participation and engagement on social media misses out on rational critical deliberation, in favour of light talk. Dijk (2012: 110) agrees and adds that the arguments made in support of these platforms tend to disregard the weak Internet connection or the absolute absence of Internet services in some countries. Taking the example of Egypt, Dijk (2012) notes that Internet was accessible to only 5% of the population, adding that these platforms are powerful in mobilising the young and publicising government brutalities especially where press freedom is constrained. In conclusion, Dijk (2012: 109) asserts that Internet use ought to be discussed within the context of a given social and political setting. It cannot be generalised from one context to the other.

Use of Facebook and Twitter in presidential elections

The use of Facebook and Twitter in presidential elections of other countries draws important correlations with how these platforms were used in Uganda's 2016 elections. This section brings forth of examples of how the platforms were used in various countries, below showing how the same were applied in Uganda.

In 2008, during the presidential elections in the United States of America in which President Barack Obama was one of the contenders, the application of social media took precedence as a campaign tool (Samuel-Azran, Yarchi and Wolfsfeld, 2015:3). This was especially the case since President Barack Obama's campaign team prioritised social media in reaching the masses and communicating the message. Candidate Obama was the first African-American to contest for the office of the President in the United States of America. Samuel-Azran *et al.* (2013:1) observe that a social networking site, my.barackobama.com, was created and it is on this site that supporters were highly engaged. For instance, the site was used to mobilise funds from supporters and other well-wishers. A total of \$265 million was raised to support the presidential bid through this initiative (Tapscott, 2009: 250-251). Several other presidential candidates and campaigns elsewhere in the world have equally taken their campaigns to social media platforms. By implication, activities and conversation on social media platforms have become one of the must-have strategies in reaching both local and global audiences, including citizens living in the Diaspora.

Citing the case of the 2010 elections in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, Broersma and Graham (2012: 408) agree that social media, especially Twitter which became a source of political news, was crucial in mobilising support. This is based on a content analysis of eight newspapers (both broadsheet and tabloid), four in each of the above countries. The study discovered that Twitter was a convenient tool for journalists who used politicians' tweets to add quotations to their stories. This had the consequence of saving journalists the time that would have otherwise been spent on physical interaction with the candidates to get their opinion. According to this study, tweets triggered news stories more in the United Kingdom than in the Netherlands, with the trend of sourcing more humorous tweets more common. This observation

on humorous tweets corresponds to an earlier one by Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) that participation and engagement on social media can mean to be devoid of rational critical deliberation. Still in relation to this study, the Netherlands newspapers used tweets mainly from politicians while the UK newspapers included both tweets from politicians and the *voxpopuli*. Broersma and Graham (2012: 410) further note that in incidences where journalists applied the quotes in their original form, the action indirectly gave politicians control over news discourse. This is because journalists did not probe further or engage the source more.

In another study, Newman (2010: 11) analysed the UK's 2010 elections and discussed the extent of social media activity on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, news websites and YouTube. Newman interviewed journalists, political advisers and social media experts involved in the elections; carried out a content analysis and comparative analysis of online sites; and conducted an online audience survey of over 200 respondents. In his conclusion, Newman noted that Twitter was a source of real time information for journalists and politicians alike. He nonetheless points out that many mainstream organisations remain uncertain on how to manage the online interaction with audiences. This is especially the case where such interactions pose a potential damage to the brand, since the conversations are unmediated. In another analysis of 1.2 million tweets during the 2012 Dutch parliamentary elections, Hosch-Dayican *et al.* (2016: 135) conclude that citizens engaged in online electoral campaigning but in a manner different from that of politicians and journalists.

In addition to electoral campaigns, Facebook has been used in elections too. In a study to analyse the 2013 Israeli elections, Samuel-Azran *et al.* (2013: 4) focused on how citizens engaged with the Facebook posts of the five leading candidates and concluded that Facebook 'shares' demonstrated a higher level of engagement as opposed to 'likes.' A similar study was conducted by Schwartz (2015:1), who used a qualitative content analysis to investigate the comments on Facebook pages of the eight top contenders in the 2011 Danish elections. This study concluded that the Facebook pages of politicians were critical in connecting citizens to politicians for feedback. The Facebook pages of the Danish candidates were used as platforms for the supporters and consequently people with divergent views were not regarded as genuine members of the

page. Schwartz (2015:9) concludes with a call for more analysis on whether Facebook is a potentially open platform for critical discussion or a campaign tool for politicians.

The case was not any different during the 2011 elections in Benin as presidential candidates took to social media, especially Facebook. Some of these candidates, as noted by Kakpovi (2011:308-309), had several Facebook profiles to their names, most of which were put up by supporters/sympathisers. Kakpovi observes that efforts to contact Facebook to have some of the profiles closed, for instance that of candidate Yayi Boni, were futile and left the campaign team fearing for how the post-election phase was to be handled in relation to the results.

In analysing the role of social media during the post-election crisis in Kenya in 2008, Makinen and Kuira (2008: 329, 331) argue that citizens used social media as a way of getting involved. These scholars write after the violence that erupted in Kenya shortly after the 2008 elections, and further argue that citizens, dissatisfied with the limited possibilities in traditional media opted for social media as an alternative public sphere to give their account of events. They point out that social media served both as platform for promoting peace and justice, as well as a channel for tribal prejudices and hate speech. Still in reference to Kenya, Churchill, Otieno and Mukhongo (2012: 275) note that the 2008 presidential post-election violence and the consequent banning of live coverage of news saw the birth of the now famous website *Ushahida* meaning Witness. This platform allowed people to crowd source and share information from their respective locations and it has since been adopted for similar causes elsewhere in the world.

The Uganda example

Uganda's presidential candidates also run their campaign on social media alongside other fora. Presidential candidate and former Prime Minister John Patrick Amama Mbabazi took the lead when he posted a YouTube video of his presidential bid (Rugambwa and Messerschmidt 2015:2). The ACME (2016: 74) report puts emphasis on use of Twitter by the presidential candidates and observed that the incumbent president, Yoweri Museveni, sent out the highest number of tweets totalling 433, followed by Amama Mbabazi with 353 and Dr. Kizza Besigye at 175. The report further notes that all the presidential candidates were slow in answering questions to their twitter

handles. Museveni responded to none of the 3,410 questions raised, Amama Mbabazi responded to eight of the 2,148 questions and Dr. Kizza Besigye managed to answer two of the 1,789 sent to his handle (ACME 2016: 80).

Outside elections, social media was used extensively to debate issues and mobilise opposition to the government in the period of the 2016 elections. Some of this included comparing pictures taken 30 years ago to the current situation in order to emphasise the need for change in presidency, just like all else had changed (Gumede, 2016: 415).

In addition, the Internet has continued to be shut down in times of high political activity. A Freedom House report (2016: 55) in relation to freedom on the Internet puts Uganda as the worst performer of the 65 countries surveyed. The report classifies Uganda as partly free and concludes that internet freedom around the world has been on a decline for six consecutive years, with a third of the 34 countries that recorded a decline being African. As noted by Abrahamsen and Bareebe (2016: 755), Ugandans woke up on election day to no Internet access and an inability to use Twitter or Facebook. The government had ordered all telecommunication companies to shut down the Internet and consequently social media (see chapter seven for a detailed discussion of this shut down). The action was condemned by human rights groups as a violation of fundamental rights to freedom of expression, although the incumbent defended this ban as a security measure to avert lies. But Ryan (2016:95) recalls that candidate Kizza Besigye had in 2011 warned that Uganda would experience an uprising similar to the Arab Spring. This, he argues, could have been part of the reason for the Internet shutdown in the hope of averting Besigye's threat. The shutdown was of concern to the international community. Ryan (2016) observes that organisations such as the European Union Observer Mission, and individuals including the United States of America secretary of state John Kerry, former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, and United States ambassador to Uganda Deborah Malac voiced concern over the Internet blackout.

It should be noted that social media is sometimes used to circulate falsehoods and fake news. It can therefore be argued that perhaps Uganda's incumbent had this in mind when he ordered the 2016 Internet shut down. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017: 221) emphasise that social media is

conducive for fake news, as partly explained by the fact that the costs of production of such content are low. Consequently, the possibility of manipulation of information during elections to cause harm in a rival camp cannot be ruled out. Such manipulation, as pointed out by Metaxas and Mustafaraj (2012: 472) may even include changing the projection of a candidate's number of followers to bias viewers about that candidate's popularity.

However, Gumede (2016: 414), differs in opinion with the argument that African governments and leaders increasingly censure the Internet and social media because they are aware of its liberating power, which they are unable to contain. This argument is in line with an earlier one by Zuckerberg (2010:178) that in situations where individual freedom is limited, Facebook makes it possible to share information quickly and thus facilitates meaningful democratic change as a medium that is not moderated. This implies that many citizens are now in position to hold their leaders accountable as they continuously debate civic issues (Gumede, 2016: 414).

Nonetheless, not all citizens on Facebook will debate freely for fear of state surveillance. Miller *et. al.* (2016: 142, 146), note that this inability to debate freely will compel many users to opt for silence on political issues, and in essence relegate Facebook to a platform for maintaining good relationships. Consequently, such users do not run the risk of clashing with those in their social circles who might hold divergent political views.

The above literature suggests that research in the area of use of social media during elections is a growing body of knowledge that has mainly focused on social media, particularly Twitter more than Facebook, as sources of news leveraging on the high level of opportunities to participate availed to citizens, politicians and journalists to voice their opinions on a wide range of issues (Broersma and Graham, 2012; Makinen and Kuira, 2008; Schwartz, 2015). In addition, these studies have concentrated on defining the relationship between social media and media organisations, examining how the two enhanced each other's processes during elections, with not so much focus on analysing the content or comments from citizens (Hosch-Dayican *et al.*, 2016). This study is designed to help fill this gap by analysing the content from citizens' participation on a television station's Facebook page. The study is conducted in a setting of growing social media use in Uganda amidst regulation of its use (Rugambwa and Messerschmidt, 2015; Kimuyu,

2018). Few studies in relation to electoral campaigning have been conducted to analyse the content of citizens' social media messages (Hosch-Dayican *et al.*, 2016: 135). The research has been positioned to advance the filling of this gap by analysing the content of citizen's social media messages on Facebook, in relation to how television engages these citizens on news as a current affairs programme.

Understanding social media as a public sphere

In the theory of the public sphere, Habermas (1989:34) talks of a public sphere of salons and coffee houses where people congregated and deliberated on critical issues. Such debate was for instance inspired by works of literature, art, economic and political disputes of the day. The coffee houses were a preserve of the men, while women congregated in the salons. Nonetheless, the nature of debate was not dissimilar. Habermas notes that both in the coffee houses and salons, discussions were held among ordinary individuals and that in these public spaces, someone's status was not important. This was because the ground for debate was levelled, with people congregating as equals. In addition, the discussions allowed for the problematisation of areas that had initially not been questioned. This public was in principle inclusive, discussing issues that became general in both significance and accessibility; everyone had to be able to participate. The setting of the public sphere therefore meant that the discussions were open to all, with no one joining the discourse having an advantage over another, which further enhanced the rational debate (Holub, 1991:3). Silverstone (1994:66) notes that in this public sphere, individuals were able to analyse and debate the business and issues of the state. Silverstone observes further that the newspaper, originally a presenter of information, increasingly became a forum for the expression of opinion. This public sphere later disintegrated because of state interference (Holub, 1991:6).

The increased participation, interaction and convergence on social media has seen Lim (2009:69) interpret the entire Internet experience as a new form of the public sphere. Social media has gradually come to impact on the way people experience online media and according to Hinton and Hjorth (2013:2), it has since become an integral part of daily life. It has come with the opportunity for new avenues of dissemination and engagement.

Castells (2008:79) notes too that social media is indeed the new public sphere. To Castells, the current society organises its public sphere based on media communication networks, which he refers to as the 'network society'. This network society is seen by Dijk (2012:24) as a modern type of society whose social and media networks infrastructure characterise and link its mode of organisation. This linking happens at all levels, be them individual or societal. Dijk (2012: 46) further notes that this network society is less inclusive in comparison to the mass society. This exclusive nature of the network society therefore implies that one must fight for a particular place or risk getting isolated.

Javuru (2013: 371) juxtaposes Habermas' original concept of the public sphere as a non-mediated space, to the situation in Uganda. He argues that similar to the public sphere of Habermas that gave voice to members of the public who had previously been excluded from issues of governance and also evaluated issues based on merit, Uganda's online forums, bulletin boards and community websites appropriately take up this role. On social media, Javuru (2013) further notes that citizens have been able to express opinion on political, economic and social issues. This suits Habermas' description of the public sphere, since the anonymity of people online ensures that their comments are evaluated on merit.

In addition to equality of members engaged in online discussion, Bentivegna (2002:53) notes that in interpreting and debating topics, these members draw from both their personal experience and information available in the media. She further asserts that the online discussants do not have preconceived positions of power. There is no expert or professor of knowledge who commands the discussion in this online communication exchange, unless it is a discussion groups requiring the regulation of a host. The knowledge shared comes from common experience as an important foundation for the continuous discourse on the Internet. Consequently, such engagement based on available knowledge in society has become a privileged element of mediation in the online political discussions.

Be that as it may, Javuru (2013: 372), disagrees with Bentivegna (2002) and notes that when it comes to Uganda, the online discussions are not based on rationality. He argues that there is a tendency for the argument to be won by the discussant that shouts loudest and successfully puts

down other discussants. This is coupled with name-calling and several other tactics to win the argument. In addition, Javuru (2013) criticises Habermas' public sphere for ignoring the power differences in society since for the case of Uganda, the expert opinion still matters. He argues that journalists, academics, university students and the Diaspora community carry more weight and authority in online discourse than the ordinary citizen. As a result, they make other participants feel intimidated or less knowledgeable about the subject at hand.

For Tufekci and Wilson (2012:365), the online public sphere is comprised of three interrelated components. These include satellite TV channels, the rapid diffusion of the Internet and its social media platforms, and finally the mobile phones. They note that the proliferation of mobile phones and consequently their addition to the aforementioned public sphere has been aided by low costs and enhanced capabilities of these gadgets. These three components are indeed available in this thesis, which examines a television station's Facebook page, arguably accessed by the citizens through various ways including the mobile phones.

Nonetheless, Bentivegna (2002: 54) observes that although there is rapid diffusion of Internet connections across different countries, the Internet remains a new phenomenon for a host of other nations. Its presence, she argues further, has tended to be a complementary resource for those who are already engaged in public affairs. The effectiveness of this 'selective' Internet diffusion has been that the arrival of politics on the Internet has not caused the much-anticipated transformations. It has instead left the exchanges and confrontations among citizens in their original intense form (Bentivegna, 2002:56). But to Zuckerberg (2010: 178) social media, and by extension the entire Internet experience, are inherently democratic. They make it possible to produce and consume content in a broad form. Such ability to share content therefore has implications on the efforts for democratisation across the globe. Valenzuela (2013: 920) agrees with Zuckerberg (2010) that social media is democratic. He observes that the Internet's ability to avail news and other information which may not be available in the mainstream media makes it possible for citizens and other interested parties to take part in political causes.

From the African perspective, Gumede (2016: 414) agrees to the potential of the Internet. He observes that the Internet and mobile phones are crucial in the ongoing efforts to extend quality

democracy across the continent, and in advocating for peace in some areas. This owes to the fact that the Internet, unlike any other media, has accommodated more voices in debating the civic and public issues in an unprecedented manner. Consequently, many citizens on the continent are in position to hold their governments accountable and directly contribute to the shaping of policies for better governance and democratic dispensation. For Avis (2016:3) the fact that the Internet penetration rates for Africa are still low should not be a cause for disregard of the potential of social media on the continent. He observes that in 2015, the penetration of the Internet was reported to be at 28.6% in Africa, a figure below the 46.4% global average. Nonetheless, he argues that the numbers of those able to access information online are increasing in Africa. This is especially true for those joining social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, with a consequence of changing the above statistics for the better. As of the June 2020 projections from Internet World Stats, the number of Internet users in Africa is over 39%⁵.

The advent of social media has made it possible for mass distribution of information, news and entertainment by anyone as opposed to this being a preserve of a few people or institutions (Dijk and Bell, 2013:3). This poses a challenge to institutions such as mass media and governments concerning the amount of information that they can keep to themselves. By implication, the operational and institutional power balance of media systems has changed. The ability to produce and distribute content online has since seen people use social media platforms in various ways, some of which require less reliance on traditional media houses. As argued by Mazali (2011:290), social media platforms have allowed users to create identity and even put up an act, which may be different from whom the real person is. The platforms thus become both representational and performance spaces, since people are not limited on the amount of creativity they can bring forth.

Moreover, social media can promote personal and group identity construction; aspects that Velenzuela (2013: 922) argues are prerequisites for political behaviour. This is possible since social media provide for multiple channels of interpersonal feedback, peer acceptance and re-

⁵ <https://internetworldstats.com/>

enforcement of group norms (Papacharissi, 2002). Miller *et al.* (2016:145) agrees and adds that social media is used to increase one's social status, make connections and affiliations with groups deemed to be prestigious and generally for maintaining good relations with other people. In addition, the services make it possible for users to create or join groups with similar interests. With this comes the ability for faster circulation of mobilisation information and political engagement. Velenzuela (2013) adds that increased participation in online social networks builds trust among members, consequently enhancing the potential of social media to increase their engagement in protest and other political behaviours.

For all the above positive impacts of the Internet and subsequently social media, Bentivegna (2002:56-57) cautions that the same aspects responsible for the Internet's democratic potential can deliver to the contrary. That with the increase in information comes with the possibility of information glut, capable of disinteresting citizens. In addition, the ability for all citizens to speak out online can become an obstacle to the development of democracy. This is because it can tend to become an incomprehensible jumble of voices. In this jumble, it becomes difficult to understand and come to the aid of a citizen. Bentivegna adds that this is compounded by the high possibility of disseminating fake or false information, especially since the Internet allows for users to hide behind pseudonyms or fictitious codes. This kind of cover arguably makes such users relay falsehoods in an almost unabated manner. Gronlund and Wakabi (2015: 5) also question the Internet's actual ability to enable greater participation. They wonder if the Internet attracts new groups of people to participate or it avails an alternative channel to those already engaged. Here, they are in agreement with Bentivegna's (2002: 54) earlier observation that rapid diffusion of the Internet may serve as a complementary resource for those already engaged in public affairs. Gronlund and Wakabi (2015) emphasise therefore, that there is a general lack of consensus on the precise manner in which the Internet enables participation. This emphasis is embedded in the fact that intensive Internet use is said to carry a withdrawal from public life by those actively engaged. In other words, while they are active online, they become dormant or non-existent in the 'physical'.

Although Moog and Sluyter-Beltrao (2001:30-31) acknowledge that new media technologies are transforming political communication, they observe that this has come with deterioration in the

quality of public discourse. The deterioration is seen through an increase in public cynicism and an erosion of participation in civic affairs. Moog and Sluyter-Beltrao nonetheless conclude that all media technologies always generate criticisms, and this is the case for the on-going misgivings about social media and the Internet. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2002:51) sum it up with the analysis that whereas those in support of new technologies argue that they can be used to promote citizen participation in debates regarding matters of concern to the public, and whereas those against these technologies identify a risk of creating a form of technological dominion over individuals, these technologies have so far only proven to have created an additional platform for communication. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2002) further argue that to understand the use of new media within the broader communication process involving political citizens, their use ought to be put into context of a given society. In this analysis, the social and political implications of the use of new technologies ought to be assessed in tandem with the values, behaviour and expectations of a citizenry in a given historical and political context.

About Facebook and its use in Uganda

In 2003, a Harvard Computer Science student, Mark Zuckerberg, started an online site called Facemash. The site allowed him to place portraits of colleagues side-by-side and compare them in a sarcastic game to determine who of the people in the portraits was better looking than the other. For this to be possible, Zuckerberg accessed university records. Facemash signalled the coming of Facebook the following year, 2004 (Lester 2014:49). Daniel Miller (2016:184) observes that in the initial stages of Facebook, the platform was dismissed as something trivial and for young people. However, this position changed when after a while, parents started using the platform too. For instance, mothers started sending friend requests to their children and this made it feel like a platform for kinship. With time, people that worked together or lived near one another became friends on Facebook and it felt like a community of people who can have a conversation. Facebook became popular within a month of its launch and as noted by Xia (2009:470), half of the undergraduate students, for whom it was initially intended, registered on the service. The Ivy League schools took it on thereafter and soon other college students followed. The platform was mainly used for the sharing of information and ideas about university issues.

In the years that followed the launch of Facebook, this platform was opened to the public with membership climbing to tens of millions of active users to date. Facebook's 2012 initial public filing as a company indicated a growth of 845 million active users worldwide, having 161 million active users in the USA alone (Safranek, 2012:1). These figures led Safranek (2012) to compare Facebook to some of the world's densely populated countries, and to argue that it would take third place after India and China. As of 2012, more than 80% of those registered on the platform were outside the United States (Lester, 2014: 49). It is arguably the most used platform on the African continent, with Bohler-Muller and Charl van der Merwe (2011:4) putting the number of users at 17 million, a figure helped by the high proliferation of mobile phones and Internet services. But as of June 2020, the number of Facebook users on the continent has grown to over 212 million (internetworldstats.com).

As noted by Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2011:1340), the platform also provides for multiple add-in functions such as virtual pets, online games, and virtual gifts thus allowing users to customise their own interface. The other features allow for one to update their profile, share photos, message and connect with long-lost friends who might be on the platform. This makes Sheldon (2015:41) describe Facebook as a social Bible. In relation to news consumption, the Facebook platform maintains active news updates, commonly known as the 'newsfeed' for followers. These updates are strategically positioned in the middle of one's Facebook page and as observed by Roese (2018: 321-321), users come across the news on such feeds as they check what their friends have posted. For such updates, Facebook works with algorithms that rank posts according to relevance per user. Without such algorithms, Roese (2018) observes that users would be overwhelmed by the growing amount of content, which is estimated to lie between 1,500 to 15,000 stories in a newsfeed. The Facebook filter reduces the figure to about 300 stories, which is arguably manageable to scroll through. Most of the features on Facebook are user-friendly and call for little technical expertise. This makes it possible for people to express themselves with ease and as desired (Zuckerberg, 2010:179). Facebook is not only available to individuals and interest groups, but corporate companies too. Such corporate entities mainly use the platform to connect with their desired audiences and seldom require approvals for members to join

(Mukhopadhyay, 2016:3). The NTV Facebook page is one such platform. It was set up for NTV to connect easily with its audience, as will be expounded on in subsequent chapters.

Uganda is one of the African countries whose citizens use Facebook in various ways. The country started using the Internet in 1991 when Makerere University was linked to universities in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe with the help of Fidonet technology (McKonnell, 1998: 152). This system allowed for regional interconnection across dial-up telephone lines. It can be argued therefore that by 2004 when Facebook was created by Zuckerberg, a section of Ugandans were familiar with using the Internet.

Uganda presently has a number of Internet service providers targeting different markets, but as observed by Ndiwalana and Tusubira (2012:13), the major mobile telephone operators such as MTN, Airtel and Africell, have chosen to concentrate more on Internet and data services. This is because the intense competition in mobile voice service providers has meant that tariffs have plummeted, thus making Internet and data services more profitable. The Annual Market and Industry report by Uganda Communications Commission (2015/2016: 7) on postal, broadcasting and Telecommunications puts Internet penetration in the country at 42.5%. Furthermore, a 2017 audience research by Ipsos, a research firm in Uganda, puts the number of people with smart phones at 32% of the country's estimated 40 million population, with a 3.3% population growth rate. Ipsos further notes that the highest concentration (40%) of people with smart phones is in the age bracket 25- 34 years, with men commanding more ownership. Over 90% of the Internet activities of the population are on social media. Consequently, owners of traditional media have used the opportunity of social media to share their content in different corners of the world, for instance through broadcasting on Facebook Live. As of the January 2019 projections by the social media statistics website, Facebook commands 82% of social media use in Uganda. The NTV Facebook platform alone has 1,184,418 million followers.⁶

⁶<https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/facebook/pages/total/uganda/>

Uganda witnessed significant incidents of Facebook use and other social media prior to the 2016 polls. Chibita and Ugangu (2017:249) narrate how in 2007 a section of Ugandans successfully mobilised through social media and averted plans by the state to have part of the country's natural forest, Mabira, demarcated for sugarcane growing. With hashtags such as #Mabira and #SaveMabira and in addition to use of traditional media, about two million protesters are said to have been mobilised to march on the streets of the capital, Kampala.

About two years later in September 2009, riots broke out in Kampala, following a stand-off between the government and the Buganda kingdom. This was over the former's restriction on in-land travel of the Buganda king to Kayunga district (central region). These riots, as noted by Javuru (2013: 367), left 27 people dead and consequently saw the government close four local radio stations (*Central Broadcasting Services (CBS)*, *Ssuubi FM*, *Radio Sapientia*, and *Akaboozi ku Bbiri*) for allegedly inciting violence and promoting sectarianism. With this blackout, Ugandans resorted to social media, mobile phone SMS and the website *Witness*, to keep updated on the events surrounding these riots.

Ojambo (2016: 33) narrates how another two years later, in 2011, Ugandans were inspired by events shared on social media and other fora in relation to the Arab Spring, in which several heads of state were overthrown as partly coordinated on social media. For example, Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya were deposed almost in succession. Back in Uganda, preparations for the 2011 elections were ongoing. The coincidence of these preparations with the aforementioned deposition of leaders made a section of Ugandans convinced that the same could happen back home. Consequently, they started sending each other messages of encouragement and hope towards the presumed overthrow of President Museveni. Ojambo (2016) further explains that such messages included phrases such as 'Mubarak is going', 'Ben Ali is no more in Tunisia', 'People power' and 'say no tear gas'. These messages were not in vain. Although they did not cause the toppling of Museveni's government, Ojambo (2016) observes that they had the effect of motivating citizens to join the 'Walk-to-Work' protests. These protests happened in the aftermath of Uganda's 2011 elections, which as noted earlier, retained incumbent Yoweri Museveni as President.

According to Kayunga (2017:82), the ‘Walk to Work’ urban protests were organised around top opposition leader Dr. Kizza Besigye, who had come second to President Museveni in the polls. These protests attracted several other political leaders and their followers as spearheaded by a political pressure group, A4C (Action for Change). The country was going through an economic crisis, which seemed to worsen by the day. This crisis, coupled with a general demand for improvement in people’s welfare, helped the ‘Walk to work’ protests gain momentum and attract other groups. Such groups included *Suubi lya Buganda* (Buganda’s Hope), which focused on the call for restoration of a federal system of governance, and the ‘Black Monday Movement’ which focused on exposing acts of corruption and embezzlement of government funds.

According to Ojambo (2016: 34), the brilliance of the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests lay in its simplicity of advocating for walking since no government could have accused its citizens of choosing to walk to their work places under normal circumstances. Ojambo (2016: 33) further notes that just as was the case in the Arab spring, social media especially Facebook and Twitter were used for quick organisation and mobilisation of participants in the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests. In addition, the protestors are said to have watched television and listened to other media sources, with a view to pick tactics used in the Arab Spring to be replicated in Uganda. Of particular interest was the need to understand how to deal with security forces. In this regard, social media was one of the meeting points for sharing information. As noted by Bohler-Muller and Charl van der Merwe (2011:6) social media has replaced the market places that were historically used to garner revolutionists. For the case of Uganda, such places included the constitutional square, Kiseka and St. Balikudembe markets (Ojambo, 2016: 32).

But the government of Uganda did not let the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests carry on unabated. To begin with, these public places for gatherings were cordoned off and restricted from unauthorised public gatherings. According to Kalinaki (2016), the sealing off of these grounds in Uganda was similar to the situation in Egypt at the height of the protests in which President Hosni Mubarak was ousted. During the protests in Egypt, Tahrir Square, a common ground for people to gather, was sealed off with iron grating. Kalinaki (2016) further recalls a similar incident in Bahrain, when the pearl roundabout, often used for public gatherings, was replaced with a traffic light junction.

In addition to closing the physical spaces, those involved in the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests were subjected to house arrest and legal proceedings over inciting violence and also charged with treason. The activities of this pressure group were eventually banned. However, the members agreed to form a democratic alliance. This alliance was tasked with identifying a joint presidential candidate to contest the polls against the incumbent in the approaching 2016 elections (Kayunga 2017:83). In conclusion, (Ojambo 2016:33), observes that Uganda’s use of social media did not equal that of the Arab Spring. This is irrespective of the efforts by Ugandans to learn the Arab Spring tactics. To Kalinaki (2016), this implies that the increased use of social media in Uganda has only served to enable citizens to be active online as they retweet and tag posts. He argues that this is complemented by the absence of physical space for protesters to converge. Nonetheless, for Ojambo (2016: 33), although the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests were unsuccessful, they changed the notion of struggle from armed confrontation to peaceful demonstration on the streets.

Another incident of the massive use of Facebook and other social media in Uganda was in 2012 when a film about Uganda’s ‘War Lord’ Joseph Kony of the Lord’s Resistance Army went viral. The film, as noted by Hinton and Hjorth (2013: 74), sought to make the situation in Northern Uganda more known and consequently get support from the United States towards efforts to have him arrested. The video was widely shared on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. It attracted over 84 million hits online after just a few days of its launch. One of the strategies for popularising the video was to use celebrities in enhancing the cause. As observed by Adelaja (2013: 327) several celebrities, including Oprah Winfrey and Justin Bieber, joined the cause. On 21 March 2012, the United States Senate resolved to support the sending of troops by African Union to assist in capturing Joseph Kony.

Nonetheless, the film about Kony was criticised for among other things simplifying a complex conflict, factual inaccuracies and for depicting Ugandans as powerless. This criticism came from Ugandans, journalists and academics online. The online platforms, including Facebook, provided space for this conversation, with some people questioning the finances of Invisible Children, the company that produced the film (Hinton and Hjorth, 2013:74).

In response, the then Prime Minister John Patrick Amama Mbabazi, uploaded a video on YouTube, in which he reassured tourists and investors that Uganda was a safe country and not at war as depicted in the film (Javuru, 2013: 373). This film on Kony and consequent reaction was another major demonstration on how social media was used in Uganda and across the globe to connect people for a common cause. Social media has had, and continues to have, impact on decision making in several African states, especially where online input from various people is considered (Adelaja, 2013: 327). Mukhopadhyay (2016: 6) agrees that social media has impact, and notes that platforms such as Facebook have amplified the communication process. This amplification has resulted in these platforms assuming a global character and reach, in which news is mutualised. With this type of impact, Mukhopadhyay (2016) further notes that social media has become a powerful tool for advocacy and activism. Nonetheless, the type of activism on social media has also been criticised as slactivism. This implies a lazy and half-hearted activism (Hinton and Hjorth, 2013: 74).

The 2016 Presidential elections in Uganda and media coverage

Gibb Ryan (2016: 94) observes that Uganda's highly contested presidential campaign started on 9 November 2015. Although Uganda's electoral commission declared President Museveni the winner of the election, some of the other competing candidates maintained that the election was gerrymandered in his favour and that the environment surrounding the election was one of voter intimidation (Oloka-Onyango and Ahikire, 2017). Presidential candidate Amama Mbabazi, who was initially thought to pose a strong opponent to the incumbent, consequently filed a petition to the Supreme Court over the outcome of this election. In contrast, Dr. Kizza Besigye- who had come second in the polls and had contested in several previous elections with the incumbent opted not to petition court. Dr. Besigye's argument was that he had lost confidence in the country's judicial process (Ryan, 2016: 99).

Part of the tension surrounding the elections was created by a vigilante group known as the 'crime preventers'. As noted by Tapscott (2016: 1), this group was a volunteer force whose role was to complement police in gathering intelligence information, control crime in local communities and help enhance security during the elections and in incidences of emergency.

With such authority secured from the then Inspector General of Police, Maj. Gen. Kale Kayihura, the Crime Preventers were positioned at the several polling stations and had permission to arrest anyone who attempted to cause chaos. Tapscott (2016:2), further observes that the crime preventers were framed both as state security forces, who were part of a community policing system, and as civilians who had opted to volunteer their time during this critical period. In addition, they were convinced to stay the cause through several tactics including a promise of material rewards and training. These promises had the added advantage of making the cohort internally compete for the promised opportunities.

According to Ryan (2016: 95), about 2.5 million crime preventers were recruited across the country. Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey (2016:608) agree that the crime preventers intimidated voters, adding that this was similar to the role played by the army and other security forces in the run-up to the elections. This involved arbitrary arrests, detention of members of the opposition and prevention of political parties from holding public events without police permission under the Public Order Management Act. Ryan (2016: 95) notes that prior to the polls, in July 2015, both Amama Mbabazi and Dr. Kizza Besigye were placed under preventative arrest and that for Besigye, this continued even after the polls, to prevent him from organising protests. Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey (2016) conclude that Uganda's security forces have for long played a repressive role to political parties. The case of the 2016 elections was not any different, but rather a continuation of the repression. This atmosphere of intimidation preceding the election was also noted by the European Union Election Observation Mission in addition to other human right bodies (Ryan, 2016:94).

Tapscott (2016:1) further notes that more tension was created by an announcement made by the secretary general of the ruling party (NRM) that anyone disrupting peace would be shot. This was in addition to some of the election adverts ran by this political party. These adverts featured skulls of those who died in the five-year bush war that brought the NRM to power. Bringing back these images at the height of the 2016 elections was a tactful way of reminding the citizenry that poor choice in the polls could easily result into war. In addition, Ryan (2016: 98) observes that President Museveni further emphasised the fear when he made a public caution that "Elections are no joke. It is a matter of life and death. If you decide wrongly, you will bear the

consequences.” As noted by Beardsworth (2016:764), attempts by the opposition to form a coalition and defeat the incumbent were failed by intra-party factionalism, interparty competition and distrust.

So, a divided opposition ran against the incumbent, who in 2016 had been in power for 30 years. In the run up to the elections and for the first time in the country, the electoral commission introduced a biometric voter verification system in addition to giving voters slips that indicated the location of their polling stations (Ryan, 2016:94). Despite this, the election was marred by what Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey (2016: 608) describe as credible evidence of vote tampering which included multiple voting by army officers and alleged ballot stuffing. This was further compounded by the delayed arrival of voting material at several polling stations for example in Mbale district, Muzimya Municipality, Wakiso District, and parts of Kampala. The voters kept waiting in queues for these materials, sometimes in vain (Ryan, 2016:95). A decision was taken the electoral commission to extend the voting to one more day. To sum it up, Ryan (2016: 94) describes presidential politics in Uganda as a national drama. Nonetheless, Banducci and Karp (2003:443) argue that elections still serve an important function. They build and maintain support for a given political system thus creating legitimacy. To put this in context, Banducci and Karp contend that there is a general declining voter turnout in different parts of the world. In addition is a growing lack of trust in politicians and public institutions the world over. Certainly, Uganda is no exception given the dissatisfaction as expressed by some of the presidential candidates and the allegations of vote rigging among others.

Media coverage of the 2016 elections in Uganda

In times of elections, the media are often faced with unbalanced coverage resulting from financial difficulties and shortage of competent staff, and yet citizens still expect the media to be ubiquitous and report from all over the country (Frère, 2015: 6-7). This expectation creates more pressure in newsrooms. In addition are the attempts to manipulate information, especially by the contending parties seeking favourable coverage of their activities or candidates. It can be argued that the other advantage Uganda’s incumbent enjoyed during the elections which could have contributed to his victory, was the unbalanced media coverage. According to ACME(2016: 40-

41), President Museveni was the most covered candidate by both the privately owned and state-owned print and electronic media in Uganda. For the case of television, the incumbent took up 44.9% of the time dedicated to presidential candidates against Dr. Besigye's 21.6% and Amama Mbabazi's 19.2%. In the print media, he took up 38.8% of the space dedicated to presidential candidates compared to 29.1% of candidate Amama Mbabazi and 21.3% of candidate Dr. Kizza Besigye, the three top contenders. The media indeed makes some candidates, their traits and the issues focused on, more prominent than others, and this can have impact on voters' early perceptions of the campaign(Weaver, 1996:39). Ryan (2016: 98) notes that incumbents tend to receive more coverage especially through state-controlled media houses and more access to other state resources. Ryan adds that President Museveni and the NRM were no exception during the 2016 elections, with the party covering up the illegality of using state resources by blurring the distinction between campaigning and civic education. According to Hopmann *et al.* (2012:174), party strategists usually try to influence media coverage with substantial success and this may in turn affect the voting patterns. For the case of Uganda, the ACME report (2016:33) notes that the NRM campaign team provided drone footage of the campaign trail to NTV for use. The television station however insisted on using its own footage, and this made the NRM team to deny NTV journalists access to the incumbent's subsequent campaign rallies. The television station eventually accepted to use the aforementioned video footage. The ACME report further notes incidences of bribery of journalists with money disguised as transport refund or facilitation. In some of the incidents, ACME observes that the journalists were instructed to give negative or unfavourable coverage to opposition candidates if they were to report about them at all.

During elections, journalists remain concerned with the need to balance news coverage, especially as depicted in the necessity to include candidates from all contending parties (Hopmann *et al.*, 2012:177). This implies that journalists and the media in general are in a constant interface with the contenders, relying on them as sources of news (Hopmann *et al.*, 2012:186). It is through the media that these candidates and parties therefore make their agenda known to the electorate. This is in addition to other information about the entire electoral process which is availed through the media (Frère, 2011:6), for example as sourced from the electoral commission or other institutional bodies charged with the electoral process.

Whereas all types of media are important for the elections, Shaw (1999:185) argues that it is television media that people usually tend to rely on more for political news and that this therefore makes such news more important. The view on the importance of television in comparison to other media is shared by Banducci and Karp (2003: 446), who caution that the quality of content on television needs to be put into consideration. They explain that if the news coverage is of high quality, then it has the potential to mobilise people. This is in contrast to sensationalist tabloid television, which they further argue can have the effect of turning off the electorate. In support of the argument on quality television news, it can be argued that at a time of elections, the electorate is more likely to turn to programmes that are informative about elections to keep abreast with what is happening, especially if such programmes are well presented.

Legislation of social media and online platforms in Uganda

The continued penetration and use of the Internet and social media has not gone unabated by different governments across the globe, with both authoritarian and democratic regimes increasingly devising means to limit access (Shirky, 2011:28). One of the ways in which access has been limited is through legislation. As noted by Dijk (2012:138), new media is usually first established before relevant legislation follows, because it is certainly difficult to legislate against the unknown. As a consequence, this makes laws and justice lag behind technology. The lag is resultant from the fact that the consequences of new technology are not always clear from the onset, and may therefore require adjustment in existing legislation gradually. For the case of Uganda and the East African region in general, Chibita and Ugangu (2017:250) note that the states embarked on a policy revisit to accommodate changes in technology, with emphasis on new technologies. In these revisits, Uganda streamlined ICTs in her vision 2040, which aims at achieving middle-income status for the nation by 2040. A similar streamlining of ICTs is evident in Kenya's vision 2030 and Rwanda's vision 2020.

Whereas Article 29 (1) of Uganda's 1995 constitution guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression, Chibita and Ugangu note that social media has ironically been accompanied by stricter state surveillance. The 2013 Facebook global government requests report shows that the government of Uganda placed a request for information on one user's account. This request was

however not honoured.⁷ “Regulation and control of social media has been justified on the basis of countering terrorism, shutting out political opponents and dissenting voices, fighting pornography and guarding against cybercrime” (Chibita and Ugangu, 2017:252). The country has other provisions to regulate the media, which include the UCC Act 2013 for regulation of broadcasts and telecommunications, and the Press and Journalist Act of 2000 for regulating practitioners. In addition, Uganda has a Media Council with the mandate to regulate the media and license journalists. Journalists are required to hold at least a bachelor’s degree in order to be recognised as professional. Journalists however do belong to an independent association, the Uganda journalists Association (UJA).

The implication of this multifaceted legislation is that journalists are sometimes unsure of which legislation to follow, or which one may be used against them. As noted by Javuru (2013: 373), Uganda’s media environment appears to allow freedom of expression but actually suppresses it. Javuru argues that with this type of regulation, online platforms become a viable option for people to exchange information. But this argument of resorting to online platforms is applicable under the assumption that they will remain clear of suppressive legislation, which is not true of Uganda. As noted by Amamukirori (2018), Uganda’s prime minister asked lawyers to help government draft laws and policies to regulate social media. She notes further that the Executive Director of Uganda Communications Commission, Eng. Godfrey Mutabazi, was in support of the need for local legislation. UCC’s concern was premised on the fact that several of the online platforms are created and managed by the western world. This, Eng. Mutabazi further reasoned, exposes Ugandans and leaves them vulnerable.

Part of the strategy on regulation has been to impose tax on social media, which according to Mugerwa and Malaba (2018) stems from the fact that the citizenry is increasingly critical on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype and Viber. Consequently, in a letter dated 12th March 2018, the President directed the Finance Minister, Matia Kasaija, to effect taxation on use of social media. This directive made it explicitly clear that the tax was not

⁷<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2013/08/global-government-requests-report/>

to affect use of the Internet for other purposes such as educational engagements, research or for reference. It was to target only social media. Mugerwa and Malaba (2018) further note that the proposed tax was contested by human rights defenders and users of social media who described this upcoming legislation as diversionary, deceptive, burdensome and injurious to individual freedoms. Irrespective of this contestation, preparation to have the tax effected continued.

Consequently, the tax took effect on 1 July 2018. On this day, many Ugandans were unable to access social media platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Google Hangouts, Yahoo Messenger, Instagram, YouTube and Skype (Kimuyu, 2018). The parliament of Uganda had in June 2018 assented to the tax as part of the amendments to excise duty. Users of social media were as per this tax required to pay UGX 200 before accessing any social media platform. Mugerwa and Malaba (2018) note that President Museveni considered the talk on social media as '*olugambo*' (opinions, prejudices, insults, friendly chats). He supported the tax as a necessity for widening the country's tax base. The president's projection was that proceeds from this new legislation would amount to between UGX 400 billion and 1.4 trillion annually. As observed by Kimuyu (2018), the tax was to be paid via mobile money platforms of the three telecom firms operating in Uganda: MTN, Bharti Airtel and Africell. The system of payment was designed in such a way that one had to pay tax before accessing the aforementioned platforms, even if they had Internet data on their devices. To Mugerwa and Malaba (2018), this was double taxation since users already pay taxes on the Internet data bundles and on airtime. The government of Uganda nonetheless defended the tax with the argument that collected revenue was to be used to improve the provision of social services. Cited in this category were services such as free education, free healthcare and maintenance of roads, all of which were occasionally demanded by citizens (Kimuyu, 2018).

In an earlier public notice dated 6 March 2018, Anthony Wesaka (2018) notes that the Uganda Communications Commission directed all online data and news service providers to register with it or face disciplinary action. Such action included the possibility of directing Internet service providers to block access to websites or streams whose owners did not comply. Wesaka (2018) further notes that prior to this directive, Uganda's capital Kampala witnessed an increase in the number of online news publications some of which were synonymous with circulation of fake

news. It can be argued therefore that the environment of increased online legislation was to protect citizens against such manipulation, although it came with a constraint to freedom of speech and expression towards the genuine ones.

But Javuru (2013:373) remains optimistic that the enthusiasm for new media in Uganda will see the development of online public spheres, which will eventually flourish. Such flourishing is however subject to more tolerance and openness in the political system. Kalinaki (2016) agrees to the need for allowing growth of online platforms, which he argues ought to be used as spaces for enlightenment. He adds that in order for social media to transform society, good Internet penetration, a democratic regime and a citizenry that unwaveringly demands for deeper democracy, are important.

The issue of whether state authorities ought to regulate online platforms remains debatable more so in the face of self-regulation of these platforms. As noted by Reid (2017:227), some social media platforms have availed functions to allow for reporting of content deemed inappropriate by other users. Facebook is one of them. In instances where inappropriate content is reported, the moderators of these platforms may remove the content or nullify the user's account. But it can be argued that this ability of moderators to remove or nullify online accounts is in itself regulation. By implication, additional regulation by state authorities would in this case make it double regulation or triple considering that some employers have set regulations on how their staff use social media (Reid, 2017). Such employers fear that uncontrolled use of social media by their staff may harm the reputation of their organisations. This is the case for media organisations that regulate their staff's social media engagement for fear of what Reid terms as posting of unethical or untrue social media content, injurious to the organisation's credibility.

Reid (2017:230) further cautions that even in the face of trolling, online bullying and publication of harmful content, there is need to exercise restraint in regulating any media content since freedom of expression is a fundamental human right. This is in addition to that fact that social media platforms are self-regulating as seen when users criticise each other for publishing inappropriate content such as hate speech. Reid further argues that even the credibility of trolls is often questioned by users of a given platform, all of which puts into question the need for

additional official legislation. It is nonetheless important to note that such calls for non-regulation of social media platforms are yet to be embraced by several states.

Chapter 3 Theoretical framework

Introduction

The previous chapter has placed the study in context of social media and its application in politics, demonstrating how the citizenry in Uganda have taken to Facebook as an alternative platform for political debate, so much that the state has had to impose a separate tax on use of Facebook and other social media. This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study. It places the study in the theory of the public sphere as espoused by Jurgen Habermas (1989) and the agenda setting theory of McCombs and Shaw (1972). The choice of these two theories is premised on the need to support different aspects of the research questions as will be explained further in the chapter. In addition, social media has arguably taken the place of the public sphere, initially conceived by Habermas.

The theory of the public sphere

To date, the theory of the public sphere and its relevance remain both contested and appreciated by the scholarly community. Whereas this section is not an attempt at presenting all the arguments for and against this theory, it will present those deemed salient to the study. The leading modern authority on communicative rationality and the public sphere is the German philosopher and sociologist, Jürgen Habermas. This chapter will therefore present the tenets of this theory, heavily relying on the works of Habermas and his arguments on how the public sphere gradually went into a decline. The chapter further discusses how news and public opinion got shaped in the public sphere, with a chronology of the impact of the printing press. It is argued later in the chapter that (social) media redeemed the public sphere, contrary to what Habermas describes as a contributor to the collapse of the public sphere brought on by the media. The chapter then moves on to discuss the agenda setting theory in brief, to give a possible explanation for traditional media's involvement in the online social media spaces.

Tracing the theory of the public sphere

Tracing the theory of the public sphere takes one to the historical feudal Middle Ages. Caldwell (2017:113) narrates how monarchs and aristocracies dominated the rural populations during this period stretching from the 5th to the 15th centuries. It was the role of the peasants to oversee the maintenance of the royal court, a public centre for the feudal society. It is in the French feudal society that Habermas (1989: 14-15) situates his theory of the public sphere, at a time of burgeoning capitalism. This capitalism emanated from the feudal organisation of the 13th century agricultural production and the petty commodity production of the craftsmen. Trade spread from the northern Italian city-states to western and northern Europe. This trade brought in its wake, the eventual rise of the Dutch entrepôt or centres for staple foods and trade fairs at the cross-roads of long-distance trade stretching across the globe. Consequently, there was traffic both in commodities and in news. This long-distance trade supplemented the already existent local markets in towns, which were gradually relegated to serving as instruments for the domination of surrounding areas rather than for a free commodity exchange between town and country.

The political order remained unthreatened by this burgeoning trade as long as members of the ruling class participated as the primary consumers of such commodities as luxury imported cloths and spices. Nonetheless, this capitalism both stabilised the power structure of the society organised in estates, but also brought forth the elements within which this structure would dissolve as a result both of the French Revolution and of the Industrial Revolution. Habermas (1989:141) further narrates how the middle class of wealthy businessmen occupied the field between the state and society. The market economy saw the emergence of the public sphere. This sphere broke the domination based on landed estate and called for administration invested with state authority, thus creating a new order that reached its zenith in the 19th century. The increased expansion of trade further entrenched the middle class and enabled them to gather and debate in public houses (Caldwell, 2017:114). The public sphere was therefore the realm between the state and the private realm. It was comprised of private individuals, who came together to form a public, although it remained part of the private realm (Habermas, 1989:175-176).

Fast forward to the 18th century, the new and affluent middle classes were engaged in critical debate in the coffee or chocolate houses in the major settlements. Such debates often initially focused on works of literature and art. Gradually, the debates incorporated economic and political disputes. From these informal gatherings in coffee houses, political, philosophical, sporting and scientific clubs emerged. Wealthy women, abandoned by the men of the house every evening frequently took to the salons. In these salons, particularly in Paris, the bourgeoisie and the nobility met with the intellectuals on equal footing. Habermas (1989) notes that although the composition of the salons and coffee houses differed in terms of size and gender, the style of their proceedings was not dissimilar. The two had several other institutional criteria in common, which included the climate of their debates and their topical orientations. In addition, they both organised discussions among private people and, up to a point, disregarded status.

The coffee house and salon discussions problematised areas that hereto had not been questioned. Initially, church and state authorities had the monopoly of interpretation of ‘common concern’ from the pulpit, philosophy, literature and art. This continued even when the growth of capitalism necessitated more information. Nonetheless, since the works of literature and art were produced for the market and distributed through it, they became similar to that type of information. In addition, such works were generally accessible and no longer the reserves of church and court. This, according to Habermas, meant that these works lost their aura of extraordinariness and their once ‘sacramental character’. Furthermore, the public was now regarded in principle as being inclusive of any private person who was educated and had the interest of participating. This intellectualised public was nonetheless aware that it was part of a larger public and consequently acted as its mouthpiece in name, and as its educator. Discussions in the public sphere did not remain internal to it. They could be directed at the outside world, as for instance published in *The Spectator* or in the *Diskurse der Mahlern* (Habermas, 1989:34, 37), two political journals of the mid-late 18th century.

The first newspapers were essentially political, single-page broadsheets containing political propaganda. These appeared irregularly, then weekly and finally with the advent of the modern-type newspaper in the early 18th century, on a daily, twice-weekly or weekly basis. And parallel to these were the political journals or magazines and the political pamphlets which were to

dominate political thinking for some 200 years. The early newspapers had content about foreign and local news (termed 'intelligence') foreign trade, transport of precious metals, imperial diets, wars, harvests and taxes. They also contained, invariably covering the front page, a mass of personal advertisements. All this information entered the public sphere and created a new revolution. Much of this information had passed through the sieve of the merchants' unofficial information control and sometimes the state administrations' official censorship. So 'News' became a commodity and was subject to the laws of the market (Habermas, 1989: 20-21).

Going further, Dahlgren and Sparks (1991:29) look at the public sphere as the space between government and society. This space allows private individuals to exercise control over the state for instance through the election of governments and local government councils. In addition, these private individuals exercise informal control over the state through the pressure of public opinion. Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli (2009:196) view the public sphere as an arena between state power and the power of the commercial and industrial base. In this arena, people converge as citizens, not political players and not as motivated by commercial interests. These citizens freely engage on matters of public concern, and formulate a public attitude called 'public opinion', resulting from reasoned consensus (Caldwell, 2017:115).

Calhoun (2003:1) considers the public sphere as a space of communication. Such a space transcends any particular place as it weaves conversations together. Calhoun adds that the space of a public sphere is constituted by communication among strangers. McNair (2006:136) agrees with Calhoun and defines the public sphere as all allocations, physical or virtual, where ideas relevant to politics are openly exchanged. To McNair, such spheres encompass the media. This media acts as a conduit for information exchange to enable meaningful political participation. Dahlgren and Sparks (1991:29) notes too that the media are central to the public sphere in contemporary times. It is through the media that citizens are availed with the necessary information, especially during elections. Similar to Habermas' reference to public opinion, Dahlgren and Sparks assert that the fourth estate of the media facilitates the formation of public opinion.

News and public opinion in the public sphere

A discussion of the concept of the public sphere for this thesis would be incomplete without proper grounding and understanding of the contribution made by newspapers. As discussed above, the content of newspapers sparked off debate in the public sphere in as much measure as it did report what was said in these debates. This upsurge in newspaper production and circulation owes its existence to the earlier invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg. Gough (1988:1) traces the history of newspapers to the civilisation of ancient China, Egypt and Rome; a history that was later to be complemented by the printing press. But printing itself initially faced restrictions. It was seen as an impingement on the prerogative of Church and State to control information (Smith, 1980:9-10). Printing meant that knowledge could now be shared far and wide to inspire new thought in various fields. In consequence, Smith (1980) observes that originality became a need rather than a danger as had been perceived in medieval society. Printing spread to affect all sectors. In some instances, a printing privilege for specified content would be extended to a guild or to trusted master printers, by the Church and State authorities.

Clearly, these restrictions could only be short lived in the face of a spreading literacy. As noted by Caldwell (2017:114), the printing press was used to produce several publications such as books, newsletters and eventually the newspapers, which usually published information about the specific towns in which they were produced. These newspapers would then find their way into the coffee houses, where their content would be debated. The newspaper was the most regular of all the above publications, most of which were produced in response to specific political, religious, astronomical or metrological events (Gough, 1988:1). It is as a result of the impact of newspapers in the public sphere that Zaret (1997:213- 214) castigates Habermas for neglecting the invention of the printing press. This is so because Habermas refers to the printing revolution as a means of disseminating ideas. To Zaret, the printing press was an independent factor that shaped new modes of thought. It was as a result of the printing press that scholars were able to assess the sources and validity of legal, religious and philosophical documents and debate the same (Zaret, 1997: 227).

With increased news, came an unprecedented wide spread literacy and a reliance on the printed word for public information (Calhoun, 1997:8). In addition to a literate population, several factors and events in subsequent centuries in Europe aided the content and therefore the continued existence of newspapers. These included the political interest in the religious wars of the 16th century, urban life and the booming trade and finance centres where news of commerce was both picked from and circulated. Zaret (1997:213) scolds Habermas yet again, for not fully exploring the impact and relevance of religion to the public sphere in politics. Zaret argues that religious discourse was a key lens through which individuals defined and debated issues in this sphere.

An outstanding outcome of the public sphere debates was the formation of public opinion. This public opinion rivalled and eventually surpassed that of the royalists, consequently transforming both the public sphere and its participants. These participants now became political actors (Caldwell, 2017:114-115). Taking Britain as an example, Lee (1976:22) observes that both liberals and radicals had for long fought for freedom to form public opinion. The contestation of the 1819 press laws and the agitation to repeal taxes on knowledge in the 1850s, were some of the historic efforts to safeguard freedom of public opinion. In addition, limitations on the use of the printing press were resisted. Lee (1976: 23) alludes to a literary work commonly referred to as *Areopagitica* (1644). This was a speech by John Milton, an English scholar and poet, advocating for unlicensed printing and resisting parliament's press ordinance. The speech among other things argued that a hidden truth was no truth at all, and that only the furnace of continued debate had the potential to safeguard the truth, as opposed to censorship. These arguments were to be replicated and integrated in struggles for a free press/public opinion elsewhere in Europe.

Habermas details how the public sphere operated politically during the 18th and 19th centuries in France, German and Britain. Britain took lead in the 18th century when wealthy people, often the product of the new Industrial Revolution, sought to influence decisions of the state by appealing to the critical public over an issue. Many of these decisions were in relation to the booming trade in textiles (especially cotton), iron smelting and paper manufacture. Habermas (1989:57-59) talks of an opposition between landed and moneyed interests. There arose as a conflict between the older and younger generation. The older generation was already established in the market while

the younger entrepreneurs still had to open new branches of trade and industry. The government on the other hand sometimes, but not always, considered the coffeehouse discussions as a breeding ground for dissent against it. By the turn of the 18th century, the press was subject to a strict law of libel. Newspapers also had to be registered and each newspaper had to be individually stamped and pay a tax before it could be sold to a member of the public.

In France, so powerful was the newspaper press considered that it was referred to as the fourth element of the constitution – the so-called Fourth Estate. But this does not mean that the press had any formal status. Rather, it was regarded as an opinion-maker and political force of great power. So, too, across the English Channel in Britain, the power and influence of the press grew and became more and more critical with the emergence of satirical and political journals. Habermas (1989:60-61) notes that throughout the century, the public sphere's development was commensurate to the state of confrontations between government and the press. Such publications have since been referred to as pioneers of the modern press because of their criticism of the king or queen, government ministers, top military officers, and even jurists. This was particularly so during the American War of Independence.

In the many German states of the Holy Roman Empire, as the 18th century drew to a close, several journals blossomed. And they too had content critical on political matters as expressed by the emerging middle classes. Habermas (1989:72-73) narrates how reading societies proliferated in many of the towns and how these availed space for critical debate. These reading societies were associations with 'public rooms'. In these rooms, the opportunity to read and discuss both newspapers and journals was made possible. Membership of such societies was according to the consensus of the majority. Women were excluded. These societies were designed to discuss and exchange personal opinion, which frequently developed into what today we would term public opinion.

As observed by Calhoun (1993:273-274), Habermas' main preoccupation in the theory of the public sphere was to establish the extent to which the opinions guiding political action can be formed or were formed basing on rational critical discourse. Habermas therefore assumed that the main differences among actors would be related to class and political-economic status. Calhoun

(1993) adds that Habermas focused on how opportunities for discourse could be structured without emphasising the inequalities of class and status. Dahlgren (1995:8) sees the existence of the public sphere in the active reasoning of the public. Such reasoning avails the necessary discourse to shape public opinion. In turn, the policies of the state are shaped, consequently developing society. Dahlgren is nonetheless cognisant of the fact that today's society does not operate in this manner. He observes that Habermas' public sphere is historically specific to Britain, France and Germany. The public sphere owed its existence to the demise of feudalism and the growth of national states. With this came the parliaments, commerce, the middle classes and printing. These aided the emergence of a public sphere in some Western Europe societies. To Susen (2011:54-55), Habermas' insistence on privilege to rational critical discourse in the public sphere is myopic. Susen argues for the need to recognise other cultural forms such as art and painting that rise above the realm of reason.

Decline of the public sphere

Dahlgren (1995: 8) notes that with the advent of advanced industrial capitalism and a social welfare state of mass democracy, the fledgling public sphere began to decline. The state became more interventionist to manage the growing contradictions of capitalism. This saw the disintegration of the boundaries between the public and private realm, which were initially crucial for the public sphere's sustenance. According to Holub (1991:3, 6), the public sphere promised democratic control and participation. Holub attributes its decline to both state intervention into private affairs and the penetration of society into state. Holub further argues that this interference inevitably destroyed the public sphere since its rise depended on a clear separation of the two: private realm and public power.

Dahlgren further points to the re-feudalisation of politics as seen when big organisations and interest groups partner with the state. He argues that this re-feudalisation displaces the role and exclusivity of the public. Livingstone and Lunt (1994:19) assert that the public sphere has also been undermined by class biases. Such biases are depicted in the criteria of admission. The public sphere has further been undermined by the absence of institutional meeting places and by new techniques of managing opinion. This absence is true of Uganda where, as noted earlier, spaces

for public gatherings are restricted by the state. One needs to ask for permission under provisions of the Public Order Management Act to access such areas.

Silverstone (1994:66) agrees with Livingstone and Lunt. Silverstone acknowledges that as the interventionist state took on more and more of the traditional responsibilities of civil society, the public sphere declined further. This was coupled with monopoly capitalism, commercialisation of culture, and control of information. To Silverstone, in this situation of inequalities in access to public fora, the public sphere was re-feudalised. Citizens became consumers as the public sphere was relegated into insignificance. Livingstone and Lunt (1994:20-21) further note that Habermas later alludes to the incompleteness of the process of refeudalisation. To Livingstone and Lunt, the incompleteness of the refeudalisation process is supported by an active audience debate. Modern media have made it possible for individuals to acquire new forms of power, information and a new awareness of rights more than ever before. Livingstone and Lunt further assert that the consequence of all this is that individuals are not passive consumers.

These private consumer citizens passively watched, read and listened to information from the comfort of their homes (Cushion, 2012:14). Cushion observes that much of this information was heavy with content on entertainment. The public sphere of mass media was in this regard short of what Habermas idealised. By mid-twentieth century and with capitalism further entrenched, the mass media became factually dubious and politically motivated (Cushion, 2012:14). By then, both print and broadcast media were in operation. The rise of public relations and advertising industries saw the emergence of what Cushion describes as a “trivial and commercially motivated public sphere.” Dahlgren (1995:8) argues that mass democracy had the effect of drawing many less educated citizens into the public sphere. Consequently, the sphere’s socio-discursive coherence fell apart. The public’s critical function was further eroded by the presence of public relations, entertainment and advertising. These elements further fragmented the public and reduced it to what Dahlgren termed ‘a group of spectators’ with a minimised intrusion in fundamental political questions.

Livingstone and Lunt (1994:20) argue for the absence of a uniform public voice since the public is inherently diverse. They reason that the public is sectioned into property owners and workers,

and each of them is mindful of their peculiar interests. For the specific case of elections, Livingstone and Lunt observe that political communication may be seen to be managed by the mass media. The voting patterns are neither formed rationally nor in discussion with other people. Such patterns therefore do not constitute public opinion, nor do they reflect rational participation. Livingstone and Lunt further observe that the people who argue in public spaces do so only to confirm their previous ideas. In this case, argument serves to express diverse appeals in persuasion. It all comes off as a staged display. Calhoun (1993:276) argues that a political public sphere is successful if it provides for a rational-critical and influential discourse. Such discourse ought to relate to shared societal concerns.

Contemporary mass media and contestation in the public sphere

Habermas (1989:160-164) decries how the highly critical public sphere of coffee-houses, salons and reading societies was replaced by what he regards as a pseudo phenomenon one, of consumption of media content. It must not be forgotten that in the 19th century, thanks to the French Revolution and the export of its ideas, imperialism and the Industrial Revolution, the countries where coffee house politics had thrived changed dramatically. In particular, one should mention that sailing ships were replaced by iron steam ships which cut the journey that had initially taken months down to weeks. There was also the development of electronic communication, first of the cable telegraph (often across ocean beds for thousands of kilometres) and Morse code, and then of the telephone. The invention of photographs was also very significant for creating a public sphere. Also to this formula which created a world society with world news was the formation of news-gathering agencies such as Reuters, and the development of modern journalism. And parallel with this was the state endeavouring, not always successfully, to regulate newspapers and magazines. And finally, and very important, there was a dramatic increase in the amount of literacy in society. All these factors are developed (as with the advent of radio and television) in the 20th century as new nation states began to emerge from what had been colonial possessions of European powers.

The public was subjected to a cycle of production and consumption as the laws of the market penetrated deep into a rapidly changing society. Literary family periodicals were gradually

replaced by advertiser-financed magazines. By the mid-twentieth century, radio stations, publishers and associations staged and profited from panel discussions. Habermas (1989) further alludes to professional dialogues administered from podiums, and round table shows on radio, television, conferences and other fora. He argues that in all these formats, the rational debate of private people is subjected to production numbers. It is a saleable package and assumes commodity form. Positions presented are bound to pre-arranged rules of the game. All these aspects make critical debate lose its publicist function. At this point, Habermas (1989: 172, 175) castigates the mass media for recommending itself as an addressee of personal needs and an authority on the problems of life. He argues further that the mass media propagates a culture of integration of information, governed by the principle of human interest. But Habermas' conclusions on the mass media's entrance to dismantle the public sphere have been contested.

To begin with, Hallin (1994:2) describes as 'confused and ultimately unsustainable', the description by Habermas of how a reading public was replaced by a mass public of culture consumers. To Hallin, mass culture replaced a complex popular culture and not the elite public sphere. The popular culture combined traditional, preliterate forms of folk culture with early efforts to join the printed public sphere. Livingstone and Lunt (1994:16-17) question whether the impact of the media inevitably causes fragmentation of public opinion and wonder if the media can play a more positive role in the formation of a discursive public sphere. They nonetheless agree to the possibility of the media becoming unrepresentative and non-participatory. This is attributed to the market, mainly comprised of centralised monopolies that offer a narrow and uniform range of meanings. To Phelan (1991:75), the public sphere availed by news media, especially television, allows for policy decisions to be legitimised. Phelan observes that although such decisions are made behind closed doors, it is not until they are subjected to the public sphere that their integrative propaganda and legitimacy takes place. Cushion (2012:15) considers the current public sphere as seen through news media and argues that this is what best captures Habermas' public sphere, envisioned centuries ago.

Livingstone and Lunt (1994:1-2) look at the public sphere of television through the lens of audience discussion programmes. For such programmes, lay people are invited to form part of a studio audience as experts discuss a topical issue. They conclude that whereas the physical

audience for such programmes may be small, the reach of the programme may cumulatively avail an audience in millions. Livingstone and Lunt (1994:10) further conclude in agreement with other scholars that the media constitute a major forum for political communication. It is through the media that the citizenry plays a role in democracy by expressing opinions and questioning established power. McNair (2006:138) agrees too and adds that the media ought to be independent of public and private interests in order to fulfil its function as a public sphere. In addition, McNair advocates for media regulation that guarantees that the content of the public sphere is not distorted. Silverstone (1994:67) observes that one of the outstanding strengths of the theory of the public sphere is its call for a sphere distinct from the economy and the state as well as the emphasis on a strong and independent media, to allow for democratic politics.

The relevance of the theory of the public sphere in today's world is one of the major criticisms of this seminal work by Habermas. According to Fuchs (2014:65-65), cultural imperialists view this theory as an effort at westernisation of the political, economic and social systems of other countries. In defence, Fuchs argues that public spaces or spheres cannot be confined to the West. He looks at the public sphere as both process and space. For as long as people act politically for a joint cause in advancing democracy, then the public sphere will always be present. Fuchs cites the uprisings in different parts of the world that succeeded due to mobilisation in the public sphere. Some of these uprisings, as discussed in chapter two of this thesis, were in Egypt, Greece, Spain, Tunisia, Iraq and other areas. These uprisings had the common aspect of making space both public and political and usually happened after a common or shared crisis. Fuchs (2014:62) notes that the public sphere created its own limits and critiques. Although the sphere emphasises universal accessibility, the social preconditions to enable equality of opportunity were lacking.

To Silverstone (1994:67), the historical and sociological inclination of the public sphere theory poses weaknesses. One of these weaknesses is that the sphere was restricted to middle-class males, in some instances, and consequently excluded women. Calhoun (1993:274) argues too that the neglect of gender and of other kinds of differences is a major flaw in the work of Habermas. Calhoun (*ibid*) further observes that efforts by Habermas to acknowledge the significance of gender inclusion or exclusion in his later works left a lot to be desired. Habermas still regarded this issue as a matter of the representation of one interest group among many. For Gillwald

(1993:69-70), the additional burden on women's time makes them less likely to enter the political sphere. Gillwald argues that Habermas' failure to explore the nature of the private sphere is a failure in democratic debate.

Hallin (1994:7) agrees with the gender flaw and observes that Habermas' work generally ignores the importance of subgroups within society. Such subgroups would have their own public spheres and work out their identity before entering dialogue with the rest of society. Essentially, the public sphere comprised of educated rich men in contrast to the private sphere of women. Fuchs (2014:64) agrees with Hallin and adds that struggles against oppression would today better happen in multiple spheres. Fuchs nonetheless raises concern over the divided nature that pluralistic spheres would bring forth. In incidences of social struggle, such spheres may be more bent towards reformist identity politics as opposed to challenging the whole. In advocating for some semblance of a single public sphere, Fuchs quotes the works of Garnham (1992:369). That democracy needs "some common normative dimensions and more generalised media." To Hallin (1994:7), there is need for a universal public sphere at both the national and global levels.

Silverstone (1994) further points to the individualistic nature of the theory of the public sphere as another weakness. This is because this theory presupposed that individuals had access to relevant information and debates. Dahlgren (1995:8) agrees and observes that the public sphere had segments of the educated and propertied strata. It exchanged information and heated debates via intellectual journals, pamphlets, newspapers, salons, coffee houses and clubs. Silverstone further points to the fact that the theory presupposed the absence of mediating institutions to control the movement of information.

Habermas is further critiqued for idealising the public sphere, which makes him fail to examine other non-liberal competing public spheres (Fraser, 1997:115). In defense of this criticism, Fuchs (2014:63) argues that Habermas uses a 'dialectical logic' in portraying the limits faced by the bourgeois ideals and values. These limits exist in the stratified power relations and class.

Is the theory of the public sphere still relevant?

Despite the above criticism of the theory of the public sphere, a number of scholars argue that the theory of the public sphere is still relevant today. Hallin (1994:3-4) contends that it is a useful theory in studying media and democracy. In these fields it is a significant empirical concept and standard of evaluation. He calls for preservation of the public sphere through continued professionalisation of the mass media. The call is premised on a concern for the commercialisation of news, which Hallin argues threatens the balance of commodity-production and public-interest in news organisations. Fuchs (2014:62) observes that the public sphere is a concept of immanent critique for criticising the shortcomings of societies. Habermas does not necessarily say that it exists everywhere, but that it should exist.

Dahlgren (1995:8) asserts too that this theory is relevant today and is present in the mass media. This is especially the case since modern society cannot permit for large groups of people to occasionally assemble and hold discussions (Dahlgren, 1995:7). To Silverstone (1994:67), the media today replaces and provides sustenance of the public sphere, albeit in a different way. Silverstone quotes extensively the works of Thompson (1990) who argues that Habermas underplays the active engagement of media consumers. To Thompson, Habermas regards media consumers as vulnerable to the media's influence. Consequently, the fragility acquired by political processes in the advent of mass communication is underestimated. Thompson makes a final argument that the theory of the public sphere was premised on an understanding of print-based culture. That the scope has since changed to allow for electronic means of engaging in public debate. Thompson further points to television and other media, accessible to an infinite number of people and concludes that mass communication has transformed the public realm. To Dahlgren (1995:23), the public sphere remains a political accomplishment, ever in need of renewal, structured by macro societal factors and shaped by the mass media, especially television.

To Fuchs (2014:60), modern society consists of distinct but connected spheres. These spheres exist in economic, cultural and political terms. The economic spheres answer to production of use values, politics deals with collective decisions, and culture handles social meanings and moral

values. To Hallin (1994:7), eliminating interests from the public sphere would be equivocal to rendering this theory null and void. This is because the theory advocates for unrestricted content in the political realm. A sense of responsibility towards the common good must therefore transcend these interests. Public dialogue on political issues collects around conflict of interest.

Gerhards and Schäfer (2009:2) are in agreement too that the public sphere concept is still important for modern societies. It is through the public sphere that relevant issues are collectively communicated to the citizenry. To Gerhards and Schäfer, the participatory nature of the public sphere allows for empowerment and inclusion of different actors. They further argue that although the mass media presents only a fraction of all collected information, it is still an appropriate forum for the public sphere today. This is because of the technical and organisational infrastructure of the mass media. The presence of media specialists such as journalists and other actors is significant for how the media operate. Nonetheless, Gerhards and Schäfer (2009:3) acknowledge that the selection modes of media content are biased. The bias owes to economic and political pressures. This limited selection of media content constrains the participatory nature of the public sphere. They conclude by advocating for use of the Internet as a less constrained public sphere. With increasing reach of the Internet in many parts of the world, Gerhards and Schäfer assert that it has the potential to fundamentally change societal communication. They add that the less restrictive nature of the Internet allows for more diversity, plurality of voice and a strengthened political interest among citizens and beyond.

To Rasmussen (2007:4), the Internet ought not to be considered as a public sphere of itself. Rasmussen argues that the discussion should instead focus on the normative energies and burdens brought to the public sphere by the Internet. In this breath, Rasmussen asserts that whereas the Internet broadens participation, it complicates the observation of the political public sphere. This point of view is advanced from the perspective of politics/state but not the media. Rasmussen insists that the public sphere should be looked at as possessing two dimensions. Each of these dimensions is oriented towards different solutions and problems. Rasmussen (2007:6-7) further argues that the traditional mass media complements political activity on the Internet. For political messages to have impact, they are in most cases picked up by the mass media. Rasmussen is

further concerned by the ‘hasty, unfocused and inconsistent chat’ on the Internet. Such chat is attributed to the expansion, democratisation and un-edited discussion offered by the Internet.

As noted by Susen (2011:52), the theory of the public sphere offers useful insights for the public sphere in the modern period. These insights give the much-needed theoretical framework for understanding structural transformations in today’s public sphere. Susen further argues for the need to continuously revise the theory of the public sphere to suit contemporary times. Social media has since been labelled the new public sphere (Castells, 2008; Lim, 2009), as discussed in chapter two of this thesis. Taylor (1992:221) is also in support that the public sphere remains central for modern society. This is because the public sphere is a free self-governing society and therefore a centre of concern. Taylor argues that of concern is whether debate in the public sphere is not subject to manipulation by money, government or both. The other concern relates to whether modern media allow for truly open exchange to enable common opinion. Taylor asserts that because the public sphere is so central to society, it is even faked in incidences of suppression. In such incidences, the result is controlled right from the start. Taylor alludes to newspaper editorials that purport to express opinion of the writers, and mass demonstrations held purportedly on behalf of a bigger public, to emphasise this argument. To Grbesa (2003:113-115), Habermas’ view of the public sphere ought to be evaluated in its historical context. Grbesa agrees with Taylor (1992) that further reflections on this theory need to be mindful of the affordances of modernisation. This modernisation is characterised by an ever-increasing social complexity. Grbesa further argues that current dictates allow for more pluralistically organised public spheres. Such spheres have professionals to identify and interpret social problems. This is in opposition to Habermas’ single public spheres. To Grbesa, the current public sphere of the media ought to avail information and allow for reasoned public dialogue. Citizens must be able to debate this information and hold government to account.

The above discussion demonstrates that the theory of the public sphere has been threshed and re-threshed, so much that a disregard of its relevance going forward would be ill advised. As noted by McNair (2000:176), both the public sphere and the idea of rationality itself have not degenerated but have been prodigiously enlarged. Perhaps Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli (2009:

86) sum it up nicely with the emphasis that the public sphere has been applied to media with an almost canonical reverence and re-embraced with an enthusiasm verging on faith.

The theory of public sphere for this thesis

It is ironic that, whereas Habermas conceives the media as a major contributor to the collapse of the public sphere, this research opts to embrace both traditional and social media as a redeemer of the public sphere. To Habermas (1989:160), the critical public sphere was replaced by a pseudo one of consumption of media content. The researcher departs from Habermas in choosing to associate with the views of all the above scholars who support a continued relevance of the theory of the public sphere. The public sphere has now been restored by a competitive market-driven media in which the masses are made up of citizens, irrespective of their levels of material possessions and other qualifications (McNair, 2000:176). It is worth noting that Habermas in his later writings acknowledges flaws in his conceptualisation of the public sphere. He justifies the reluctance to put out a revised version in the argument that the book, as published in the 18th edition, had become established as a textbook in some study programmes. In addition, he talks of a “contemporary relevance bestowed on the structural change of the public sphere by the long-delayed revolution occurring before our eyes in central and eastern Europe,” as another justification (Habermas, 1997:421).

As is the case with any sociological generalisation, selection, statistical relevance and weighting of historical trends and examples pose a problem involving great risks, especially for someone who, unlike the historian, does not go back to the sources but instead relies on the secondary literature. Historians have rightly complained of empirical shortfalls (Habermas, 422- 423).

Away from Habermas’ confessions on the shortcomings of the public sphere concept, the researcher finds important connections between this theory and some of the literature review relating to how social media, particularly Facebook, operates as a public sphere (see chapter two on this). It is important to note that the African continent has in general not benefitted from well-developed literature and theorising on the concept of the public sphere (Caldwell, 2017:121). The

researcher finds the theory of the public sphere pertinent in answering the research objectives in relation to Uganda, one of the countries in Africa, and consequently contributing to theorising of the concept as seen in online spaces. Of interest is the trend of traditional media moving online to among other things engage more with the audience. As noted by Rasmussen (2007:9), more people speak up on the Internet compared to traditional media, such as television. To this effect, the blend of television and social media will be crucial in answering the research objective ‘to determine how NTV used Facebook in engaging followers on the political discourse during Uganda’s 2016 elections.’ As noted by Cushion (2012:3), a play-off between television and the Internet is the way of the future. Rasmussen (*ibid*) further adds that the volume of interaction on the Internet is so high that it produces heterogeneity. This heterogeneity has difficulties in controlling itself communicatively. For the case of Uganda, Habermas’ public sphere is an extremely useful construct. The high levels of engagement on social media allow for comments to be evaluated on merit (Javuru, 2013:371). This is concretised by the fact that social media is considered democratic (Zuckerberg, 2010; Valenzuela, 2013). It is hoped that social media will bring quality democracy to Africa by the high volume of civic matters discussed thereon (Gumede, 2016). The middle-class sought to influence civic matters and politics too, through the public sphere (Habermas 1989). As earlier discussed, social media has been used in political situations in various parts of the world, Uganda notwithstanding (ACME, 2016). The special case of the 2016 elections stands out as Uganda’s first social media election. The researcher is nonetheless cognisant of the fact that the Internet and its use are still new in Uganda, similar to other parts of the world (Bentivegna, 2002; Kalinaki, 2016).

To Rasmussen (2007), the online public sphere offers more possibilities for expression but less guidance for politics. It also offers a wide range of topics and allows various individuals to select what suits their interests. This plurality of voices in the online public sphere resonates with Habermas’ public sphere that allowed the nobility and the intellectuals to meet on equal footing (Habermas, 1989:33). Rasmussen (2007:10) nonetheless contends that new forums tend to have polarised debates, unequal participation and lack of respect in debates among other issues. This raises questions on the value of digital forums as a public sphere. To Grbesa (2003:118), the Internet provides a forum for discussion between pressure groups, which may result into real

actions. Ramussen (2007) is further concerned about how the numerous segmented online conversations integrate into larger sentiments of public opinion. Ramussen concludes that although online communication is widely accessible, it draws more on genres for private communication. The above arguments by Rasmussen (2007), Grbesa (2003) and other scholars on use of social media will guide a subsequent discussion of the research objective ‘to examine the nature of engagement on Facebook as a public sphere.’

Habermas (1989:37) points out that the traditional media, such as the 18th century political journal *Diskurse der Mahlern*, often published discussions in the public sphere. This stemmed from the fact that the public sphere was aware of the larger public. This research shows a manifestation of television linking with the public sphere of social media. As further noted by Rasmussen (2007:7), traditional media complements social media. In addition, public spheres cannot be confined to a particular space and place (Fuchs, 2014:65).

The connection to agenda setting

Whereas the theory of the public sphere is sufficient in explaining the presence of citizens on social media as they debate issues of common interest, it falls short of explaining the presence of traditional television media in the same space. As argued by Cushion (2012), television news attracts a large section of the audience of traditional media as a valued and trusted source of information for many activities. The viewership and interactivity has seen television contribute to the public sphere by allowing viewers to debate through talk shows or phone-ins (Bignell, 2004). This then raises questions as to why television/television news finds it necessary to enter the online public sphere, yet it commands a substantial share in traditional media audiences. Could it be that television’s presence in the online public sphere is to gain more popularity as is the case in the offline mode? To help find an answer to this puzzle, the agenda setting theory is adopted and will be discussed in relation to social media.

The events that citizens read or watch in the news come from structured processes of media houses. As noted by McCombs (2014:1), citizens deal with a second-hand reality structured by journalists’ reports about events and situations. This ability of the news media to first of all

identify key issues and secondly to influence the salience of these issues on the public agenda is what McCombs and Shaw termed agenda setting. To establish the validity of this agenda-setting claim, McCombs and Shaw (1972:177-178) investigated what the key issues of concern for voters in the 1968 presidential elections in the USA were. The investigation was limited to voters at Chapel Hill. The issues raised by these voters were compared to the issues in the news media consumed by the same voters. It was discovered that the five issues of foreign policy, law and order, economics, public welfare and civil rights that dominated the media agenda had a correspondence to those raised by the Chapel Hill voters (McCombs, 2014:4-6).

But as observed by Uscinski (2009:797) the public occasionally influences the media's agenda too, even if agenda setting experiments were not designed to explore this possibility. Therefore, attempts to study the influence of the public agenda on the media using units of time lags, and sets of issue areas may be insufficient. The audience driven framework would be evident where general concerns such as the environment would make the media alter its agenda (Uscinski, 2009:798). Weaver and Choi (2017:359) agree with Uscinski (2009) that the bulk of research on media agenda setting has prioritised the relationship between news media agendas and public agendas yet the reverse is true when the public influences the media agenda. External factors such as news sources, other news media, the norms and traditions of journalism, unexpected events and media audiences influence the media agenda. Weaver and Choi (2017) further argue that with these external factors in place, it is doubtful that the media and journalists are the original agenda setters for the public. This argument is cognisant of the fact that the media retains the discretion on what issues to amplify. Personal experiences, group perspectives, and real-world conditions avail several issue concerns to people, as noted by Bring, Goldenberg and Miller (1980:18-19).

By implication therefore, Erbring *et al.* argues that the agenda setting effect ought to be analysed one issue at a time. Behr and Iyengar (1985:39) agree too that several other issues contribute to issue salience amongst the public, such as personal experiences and the prevailing circumstances in society at a given point in time. In such instances, agenda setting serves to alert citizens of current realities. Agenda setting is further guided by editorial and news norms or commercial interests, in which case the media agenda setting would be divergent from the pressing issues in

society at a given point in time (Behr and Iyengar, 1985: 40). Consequently, the media create an image about reality. This is done either consciously or unconsciously (Fourie, 2018:244). Uscinski (2009) concludes that researchers continue to struggle between the ‘agenda-setting’ framework that allows the news agenda to influence the public agenda and the ‘audience-driven’ framework, which allows the audience agenda to influence the news agenda. This study adopts the agenda setting theory to make sense of how NTV positioned itself on Facebook and to further examine any external factors that could have had a bearing on the station’s choices of news postings. For the special case of elections, Owen (2017:823) observes that reporting on campaigns is not exclusive to professional journalists, since bloggers and average citizens cover events and provide commentary that is widely available. From this analysis, the study argues (as explained in chapter five) that the fear of extinction coupled with a struggle to retain control over national political discourse explain Television’s aggressive presence on Facebook.

Television and agenda setting

In explaining why agenda setting occurs, McCombs (2014:24) observes that the limited space available in traditional media, coupled with an ever-increasing host of issues necessitates journalists to relay only a sample of the available concerns. This is done following a traditional set of norms that inform and guide the practice of journalism. McCombs (2014:2) makes reference to an observation by Cohen that “the news media may not be successful in telling people what to think but they are stunningly successful in telling their audiences what to think about.”

The selection criteria on what to include or exclude in a media report is even more intense in television given its nature of limited airtime. For television therefore, even a mention on the evening news communicates high salience of a topic (McCombs, 2014:2). Topic salience is further demonstrated by its recurrence in the media, and it is the same issues that the public will tend to prioritise as most important. This way, the news agenda becomes the public agenda. Behr and Iyengar (1985:40) assert that the medium of television has significant agenda setting clout, contrary to scholarly output demeaning the same. To Hill (1985:341-342), the viewers’ ability to recall what was on the news has direct implications for agenda setting and cannot be ignored.

This ability is influenced by several factors including the motivations for viewing in the first place, prior knowledge about the topic and the attentiveness with which they view. For television news, Hill hypothesises that the traits that influence agenda setting are higher in the presence of colour television, uninterrupted planned viewing of the news and a higher perception of television as informative as opposed to associating it with relaxation.

Social media and the demise of agenda setting

This study is interested in the online scenario of agenda setting. As noted by Fortunato and Martin (2016:130), an analysis of the construction of public agendas in contemporary times ought to consider individuals' and organisations' use of social media. This is so especially since "these technological communication options now combine with the distribution of messages through the traditional mass media and advertising to influence the agenda- setting process."

With the advent of the Internet and subsequently social media platforms such as Facebook, the agenda-setting role has come into question especially since traditional media have joined these platforms. As noted by McCombs (2005:544), the vast Internet communication options including websites, emails, chat rooms and of course social media, have changed the communication behaviours of people and allowed for a multiplicity of agendas to surface. Feezell (2018:482) agrees that social media is capable of causing an agenda-setting effect through exposure to, and the subsequent sharing of, political news and that this effect is strongest for politically uninterested individuals owing to their uncertainty of political affairs. To Fortunato and Martin (2016:129-130), the format of today's political communication environment is a nexus of content from media houses, agendas of different individuals/organisations, new communication platforms, audiences seeking information and finally, the laws governing election campaign policy. In such a multi-faceted political communication environment, Fortunato and Martin note that the media's inherent role of informing citizens has now become more challenging. This is especially so because technology allows individuals and organisations to use social media to directly reach the desired audience in times of elections and other periods.

In addition, Fortunato and Martin (2016:130-131) note that during campaigns, social media is used for controlling the message content and as a result, it performs an effective agenda setting function. The implication is that analysis of public agenda setting must be cognisant of how social media is used. The agenda setting theory is especially important in analysing the reciprocity between political reporting and political views of people during elections (Fourie, 2018:245). For the special case of elections therefore, McCombs (2014:117) observes that those involved in the campaign see an immediate purpose to capture the media agenda. Such efforts are informed by the fact that success in capturing the media agenda translates into success in capturing the public agenda. As a result, a lot of money is spent on political advertising in both the traditional mass media and on social media to relay the agenda as desired by campaign teams.

In addition, campaign teams are at liberty to set the agenda through political advertising on social media, with a consequence of influencing the agenda in traditional media. This direct communication enables less distortion of the message towards the intended recipients (Fortunato and Martin, 2016:142). But to Hayes (2008:134), it is after the media choose to focus on the issues or agendas that different candidates or their teams have focused on, that the same can be transmitted to voters. In the face of social media however, and with the ability of candidates to directly reach audiences, it can be argued that the choice of traditional media to amplify candidate messages or not, loses intensity.

The ability to use social media and other online platforms by different people and organisations has seen McCombs (2005:544-545) point towards a possible demise of the agenda setting function as traditionally known. This fear of demise is premised on the continued fragmentation of audiences, as they pick information from diverse online sources. In this situation, the result is presumed to be a diversified public agenda and scattering of public attention. Nonetheless, this possible demise will best be in action as and when the proliferation of the Internet reaches its equilibrium in different societies. McCombs (2005) acknowledges that with the digital divide in different societies, a substantial number of people still receive information through the traditional media. In addition, the popular Internet news sites are subsidiaries of traditional media such as television and newspapers. Aruguete (2017:36, 42) agrees with McCombs (2005) on the possible demise of traditional agenda setting. Aruguete (2017) notes that new media platforms threaten

traditional media's ability to steer the public agenda, since these platforms allow for unrestricted alternative sources of information. Aruguete (2017) sums it up with a call for recognition of audiences as active users, empowered and capable of forming their own perceptions not necessarily permeated by the press. These active users can therefore challenge dominant agendas in an unprecedented manner. The ability of users of social media to share content is what Roesse (2018:315) terms as the number one currency in social media, and it is at the core of making content go viral. As social media users produce and share content amongst themselves, they are able to bypass both the gatekeeping and agenda setting role of traditional media.

The subsequent section describes the exact details on how this study was designed and executed. Details on data collection, requisite ethical considerations and analysis methods are provided to enable clarity on the process and practice of method. Describing the methods and assumptions informing the study is important to facilitate easy evaluation of the research as well as to enable not only comparison and/or synthesis with similar studies on the topic, but also to help other researchers carrying out related projects in future.

Chapter 4 Research methodology

Introduction

The objective of this study is to examine how the 2016 Ugandan presidential elections discourse, as reported on NTV Uganda's Facebook page, was engaged by followers online. The study departs from Habermas' (2006: 416) argument that "there are two types of actors without whom no political public sphere could be put to work: professionals of the media system— especially journalists who edit news, reports, and commentaries— and politicians who occupy the centre of the political system and are both the co-authors and addressees of public opinions". Accordingly, politicians and political parties are generally the most important suppliers of news as they hold a strong position about negotiating privileged access to the media (Habermas, 2006).

'News' is often claimed to be the lifeblood of democracy, and by others as governance by dialogue (Fenton, 2010). Broadcasters are understood as ideally placed to provide space for and facilitate this dialogue. However, this can only happen if broadcasting services are marked by elements of accessibility, plurality and participation, that is, if they are open to the full spectrum of diverse views (Lugalambi *et al.* 2010). The interactive and participative nature of new technologies is claimed to impact on the democratic practice so much that web-based operations have come to be viewed as essential for newspapers, broadcasters and news agencies (Fenton, 2010).

But new media research on politics and news media has been concerned with fulfilling democratic ideals and the ICT potential (Davies, 2010). These studies have observed how the Internet has made traditional media such as print and broadcasting more publicly responsive, and widened public participation and engagement with politicians and journalists (Fenton, 2010). For Dijk (2012) terms such as democracy, collectivity, and participation implicitly conjure Habermas' model of speech communities and present these platforms as new carriers of the public sphere. This is particularly so as television has increasingly integrated social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube in its mass media logic (Dijk and Poell, 2015: 149). With the same orientation, NTV runs content channels on the social networking site

Facebook, where not only stories are made available to a wider audience but also the television can engage with these audiences based on the posted news content.

Spawned by curiosity arising from the foregoing, this study employs netnographic techniques to address the following questions:

1. How did Nation Television use Facebook in engaging followers on the political discourse in Uganda during the 2016 presidential elections?
2. What is the nature of engagement on Facebook as a public sphere?
3. In what ways do institutions of government and television media interfere with public participation on Facebook?

In order, therefore, to place the methodological choices followed in this study into perspective, the chapter begins by examining the paradigmatic and theoretical assumptions underpinning the qualitative approach to research. This is followed by an explanation of the research paradigm, design, sampling strategy and the approach to data analysis.

Qualitative research approach

A quantitative approach rooted in its positivist philosophy may not yield meaningful analysis on the nature of the public's engagement with NTV news content on Facebook, and provide insight into responses to news coverage within a speech community. An adequate explanation for this complex phenomenon in the context of Uganda requires an approach rooted in a qualitative paradigmatic philosophy. Qualitative methods are ideal for studying the ways people understand complex phenomena and difficult-to-understand concepts (Weiss, 1994). In so doing, qualitative research transforms the world and makes it visible through interpretive, material practices (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 3). The interpretive researcher therefore makes meaning of phenomena in its natural setting, which is a key attribute for qualitative research.

The qualitative approach is preferred for its ability to allow for a combination of both macro social critic and micro organisational analysis and understanding of whether social media, with

specific reference to Facebook, can be considered as a new public sphere in Uganda. And if it can, an understanding of how Facebook is used in Uganda shall be discussed subsequently.

Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive (Creswell, 2007). Accordingly, this research falls within an interpretivist research philosophy whose underlying assumption is that a positioned researcher makes subjective interpretation of subjective experiences. When conducting a qualitative inquiry, a researcher is already embracing the assumption that there are multiple subjective realities. Thus for Creswell (2007), choosing a research approach is effectively making a philosophical assumption and stance towards the nature of knowledge (ontology), and how that knowledge can be discovered (epistemology).

This qualitative approach contrasts the quantitative one which privileges distance and objective separateness from independent reality. Due to the minimised distance between the researcher and the participants, the procedures of qualitative research thus tend to be inductive and shaped by the researchers' experience and values and paradigms or worldviews, that is beliefs that guide action (Guba, 1990). There are four dominant paradigms that mark the beliefs that qualitative researchers bring to their inquiry namely postpositivism, (social) constructivism/interpretivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2007).

Research paradigm

Researchers are always urged to declare their own philosophical assumptions and sensibilities not least because “the procedures for conducting research evolve from a researchers' philosophical and theoretical stances” (Creswell, 2007: 2). There is also a general acceptance that good research requires making these assumptions explicit in the writing of a study. Research paradigms are an integral part of one's research philosophy, which frames the development of knowledge and researchers' understanding of the nature of that knowledge. A paradigm can be defined as “a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009: 118).

As with other qualitative inquiries, this study employed social constructivism, which is often combined with interpretivism (Creswell, 2007). Informed by this philosophy, the researcher operates from a position of appreciation that knowledge is created, in an ever-ongoing process that occasionally calls for revisiting of established constructs.

As noted by Kaya Yilmaz (2008: 162), the constructivist paradigm privileges the position of an observer in describing and making meaning of the world or its events. This notion implies that different individuals have the ability to construct knowledge as informed by their experiences. Therefore, knowledge cannot exist outside the mind. This is arguably the case with how the notion of the public sphere is currently conceived; as an online virtual gathering of political actors by some scholars, while others argue for its nonexistence (refer to chapter three). This research adds to the dimension of the online public sphere and therefore seeks to create knowledge by bringing forth the voices of followers on a Facebook page of traditional media, and as indicated above, departing from Habermas (2006). The need to make meaning out of phenomenon necessitates the creation of concepts and schemes, whose validity is often put to test with new experience. Such validity does not take place in a vacuum but is rather informed by shared practices. It also embraces the fact that all knowledge claims happen within a conceptual framework. In this framework, the world is consequently described and explained (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 197)

As with Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Yilmaz (2008: 162) notes that under the constructivism paradigm, knowledge is constructed by individuals or groups as they consistently make meaning of their environment and the world at large. This implies that the knowledge created is internally constructed as informed by particular experiences; and not passively received from the world. Consequently, such knowledge can be temporary and arguably specific to particular situations. For Yiasemina Karagiorgi and Loizos Symeou (2005:18), the entire process of actively constructing knowledge is inherently subjective. It follows therefore that constructivism presents in various forms. These include radical, social, physical, evolutionary, post-modern and information-processing. For purposes of this study, the social constructivist approach is preferred. Social constructivists believe that knowledge is viable in social contexts and they therefore advocate for a shared reality. In explaining the social constructivist approach, Yilmaz (2008:163)

notes that it considers bodies of knowledge as human constructs. As a consequence, a series of events and happenings in the political, economic and social context have had and continue to have implications on the shaping of knowledge. The theory of the public sphere as seen in chapter three has been constructed and reconstructed over time, starting off with the feudal Middle Ages to its current contested form on social media. This thesis continues in this tradition of constructing relevance and bringing further meaning to the theory of the public sphere, in the context of Uganda.

Ethical dilemmas for research on Facebook

Research on social media presents with several ethical dilemmas to researchers, and so was the case for this research. One of the dilemmas this researcher was faced with was how to secure permission or informed consent from the different people whose Facebook posts were to be analysed in the study. The real challenge was due to the fact that the Facebook posts chosen for analysis were posted in 2016, and the study was to be concluded four years later in 2020. This dilemma of securing informed consent was also in recognition of the additional fact that not all Facebook users go by their actual names while engaging on the platform, nor can their submitted online addresses be taken to be factual should a researcher attempt to reach out to them. Niina Sormanen and Epp Lauk (2016: 63) observe that attaching meaning and getting a proper description of what qualifies to be ‘informed consent’ when dealing with big data on social media remains a puzzle. This situation is compounded by the absence of ethical guidelines on how to conduct scientific research on social media in different countries. The researcher agrees with Sormanen and Epp Lauk (2016) and observes that the absence of ethical guidelines on social media in Uganda was a challenge for the period of this study.

To address the dilemma of securing informed consent, the researcher approached NTV for permission. This was because this researcher was interested in Facebook data particularly off the page of NTV and not individual pages of Facebook users. Such data can arguably be considered public since it was posted on the Facebook page of a television station. As explained by Townsend and Wallace (2016: 5-6), researchers are constantly in debate as to whether data and information publicly posted on social media is best categorised as public or private data. This

concern is often in recognition of the fact that social media users subscribe to the terms and conditions of the platform, although it is debatable whether a substantial majority of these users fully read the terms or even comprehend the implications of their online engagement. Luckily for researchers, some of these terms carry provisions that allow them to access the data for scientific research. It is generally difficult for researchers to obtain informed consent from online users. Consequently, social media's big data is accessed and analysed without informed consent from each of the users, most of whom are barely aware that the data is being used. Townsend and Wallace (2016) conclude with the emphasis that researchers at least need to obtain informed consent when accessing data that is considered to be of a private nature. However, data from Facebook users is considered public owing to the fact that users individually determine the information they are willing to share publicly (Sormanen and Lauk, 2016). It is with this hindsight that the researcher approached NTV for permission and not the different users whose posts were to be analysed. Through this avenue, two letters of consent to conduct the study were secured from the management of NTV. The letters were to accommodate a change in topic as the research progressed. This change was more in relation to a narrowing in the scope of research investigation. The letters are attached as appendices A and B.

Ethical clearance

The first step at securing ethical clearance was with the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Such clearance is given after the successful presentation and defending of one's research proposal. For the Centre for Communication, Media and Society, such presentations happen at weekly colloquia. The researcher made her presentation on 25 October 2016. The aforementioned ethics clearance form is attached as appendix D.

Back in Uganda, UNCST (Uganda National Council for Science and Technology) requires that all research to be conducted in the country must be approved by this institution. The approval process is conducted at two levels. The first level requires that researchers submit their research proposals to the relevant REC (Research Ethics Committee) in the country as per the discipline of study. Over 25 RECs are accredited to perform this function. This research was subjected to the

Makerere University School of Social Sciences REC. The approval letter from this REC was given in February 2018 and is herewith attached as Appendix E. The second level of approval is given by the UNCST following recommendation from the REC. The approval letter, secured in April 2018, is herewith attached as Appendix F. After the successful completion of all the above ethical clearance processes, the researcher proceeded to collect data.

Methods of data collection

In this study, a range of methods were employed to bring to empirical scrutiny the ways in which followers on the NTV Facebook page engaged news on the political discourse in Uganda during the 2016 presidential elections. Ethnographic studies are known to use a combination of research methods. These may include focus group discussions and in-depth interviews (Pitout, 2005: 274). This study used a combination of netnography and in-depth interviews for data collection. These two methods are explained further below, with their respective sampling strategies. But first is an explanation of ethnography and by extension, netnography.

Ethnography

The study utilised the ethnographic research tradition whose intent is to obtain a holistic picture of the topic under investigation, examining the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others (Creswell, 2007; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhil, 2009). Ethnography, as observed by Deborah Cameron (2001: 53), belongs to the specialist vocabulary of anthropology and relies on participant observation to gather data. Ethnography privileges the need for researchers to go to places where the action is taking place and live with the affected people for extended periods of time, to allow for first-hand information gathering. This action, Cameron (2001) further notes, implies that the researchers are simultaneously inside the culture and outside it, trying to understand the way its members think and act, while at the same time maintaining a professional distance to enable gathering of facts. This ability to be at close proximity with the subject of research makes researchers appreciate the reality as seen by the participants. To ethnographers, it is such lived reality that allows for the revelation of social reality. This lived reality can either be overt, where the researcher makes themselves and their

purpose known, or covert where the researchers' presence is concealed from the participants (Pitout, 2005: 266-270). An inquirer can only get to understand subjective realities by getting as close as possible to the phenomena being studied, mainly through conducting studies in the field where participants live and work. Ethnography carries the advantage of allowing researchers to get first-hand information immediately, and to modify the research questions as they go along. It is arguably one of the outstanding ways to study people's attitudes and behaviours (Pitout, 2005: 277- 278). This study picks from these benefits of ethnographic research to investigate social media in an online version of ethnography.

Previous empirical studies on social media as a potential public sphere have used conversation analysis of social media posts or other quantitative measures to examine avoidant or participatory behaviours (for a list of these, see Kruse *et al.* 2017). But the increasing interest in using online communities such as social networking sites, blogs, and news groups among others to study phenomena has not only projected the Internet as an important site for research, but also birthed new approaches to such research. One such approach employed for the present study is variously known as online-ethnography, virtual-ethnography or simply netnography. Ethnography is an increasingly popular methodology to study computer-mediated social interactions (Bowler, 2010; Kozinets, 2010). The study employed online ethnography that utilised both observation and in-depth interviews to enable detailed appreciation of the political discourse on Facebook as a social media platform. All forms of ethnography, as Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath (2017: 319) note, are a form of case study (though the reverse is not true). As with any case study, an ethnographic case study investigates a unit or units, observed either at a single point in time or over time (Gerring, 2007: 19). This enables researchers to gain a rich and deep understanding of the context of the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009: 146).

Netnography

As already alluded to in the previous section, this study picks from the benefits of ethnography to investigate an online phenomenon. The technique is known as netnography. While others think of netnography as a recent phenomenon, it is only recent to the extent of its name, coined by Robert Kozinets in 1995 when he studied online fan discussions (Kozinets, 1997). Defining ethnography,

Creswell (2007:68) categorises it as “a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets” the meaning of the behaviour, the language and the interaction among members of a culture sharing group.” Netnography can thus be understood as an online version of ethnography that attaches itself to the same qualitative research approach and various research techniques as with ethnographic studies (Bowler, 2010). In other words, netnography applies qualitative research techniques in an online context. Its foci are the reflections and data on human communication—textual or multimedia such as video, audio, pictures - provided by online communities. There is general consensus that ethnography uses observation as the main data gathering technique although interviews can also be used (Creswell 2007, Lewis, Thornhill and Saunders, 2009). For this study, data was collected through both observation of the online conversations as well as interviewing officials from NTV Uganda. The study period was two months, January - February 2016. This enabled an analysis of the Facebook conversations posted prior, during, and shortly after the 2016 presidential elections which took place on 18 and 19 of February 2016.

As an online version of ethnography, netnography is commended for being less intrusive because it uses mainly observational data. Netnographic observation is thus more naturalistic than other qualitative techniques such as interviews and focus groups. Crucially, netnography enables researchers to examine information, including sensitive details, voluntarily revealed by participants, unasked and naturally (Langer and Beckman, 2005). As such, there is no room for participants to alter their reactions or answers such as what happens during interviews or focus group discussions. Netnography allows researchers to download data from an online community even long after the social interaction. As such, interactive media pages present ‘big data’ (Skalski, Neuendorf and Cajigas, 2017: 202- 204). For example, the observation reported in this study takes place in 2020, four years after the conversations happened on Facebook. What this means is not only that the observation was on what Wilson and colleagues (2012) call ‘traces’ of observable behaviour, but also that the researcher observed but did not participate in the interactions as ethnographers do. Accordingly, some key elements of ethnographic research such as self-reflexivity in which the involvement of the researcher in the society and culture of those being studied is particularly close (Davies, 2008:46), was not required. The selection of

ethnographic/netnographic cases is generally challenging. Below is a discussion and justification for the selection of NTV Facebook page for this ethnographic case study.

NTV Uganda Facebook page as a site for research

While online social interaction on social media sites could be conducted on any platform such as Twitter, YouTube or any other microblogging site for any person or institution, selecting Facebook was a deliberate choice made from a consideration of practical, historical and contextual issues. Facebook, not only promises favourable conditions for the public sphere (Fuchs, 2012) but is also consistently ranked among the most popular speech communities in Uganda. This renders it as a rich site for analysis of how social power is discursively enacted and resisted in the Ugandan society. And as earlier explained, this study argues that Facebook was the run-to platform after the government of Uganda clamped down the famous radio talk shows, thereby narrowing the space for political debate. An analysis of how citizens of Uganda have continued to engage with political discourse would in this case be justified in testing the validity of the argument that Facebook is Uganda's new public sphere.

Facebook is unarguably the most popular social networking platform not only in Uganda but across the world, with over a billion users spread in different countries. Facebook has not only increasingly become a popular site for articulation of national discourse, but also attracted recognition by researchers as a novel tool for research. As of April 2020, Facebook had approximately 2.5 billion active monthly users (socialbakers.com). Meanwhile, NTV Uganda's Facebook page has one of the largest followings in Uganda, standing at 1,357,273 followers million as per the April 2020 statistics from socialbakers.com. Billions of pieces of multi-media content and social interactions are shared every day. As Robert Wilson *et al.* (2012: 201) put it, this sphere of social behaviour "provides social scientists with an unprecedented opportunity to observe behaviour in a naturalistic setting, test hypotheses in a novel domain, and recruit participants efficiently from many countries and demographic groups". The present inquiry derives from the fact that while other scholars have surmised Facebook as a form of "online public sphere" (Robertson *et al.* 2010: 13), the question of whether it could be considered as a true public sphere remains unanswered.

Wilson and colleagues outline several reasons why Facebook, as an ongoing database of social activity, can be an important site for research. Crucially, activities performed on Facebook can leave traces and therefore provide a useful source of observable data, which allows opportunities for studying human behaviour. They also note that as with other online social networks, Facebook is interesting to social scientists because it reflects social processes— how people relate to one another and share information— and has also become a core feature of daily life. Other scholars have also viewed Facebook as an ethnographic tool for social science research. Discussing the creative utility of Facebook as an ethnographic tool in which to study transnational migration, David Piacenti *et al.* (2014) argue that it allows the researchers to transcend the four structural dualities that constrain transnational ethnographic research namely geographic, travel funding, travel time, as well as the logistical constraints of entrée into new ethnographic contexts. These and many other functionalities are useful to social scientists who hope, as with this study, to understand how citizens react to political discourse driven by a television station that operates at a national level. Contextually, this research sought to examine the nature of engagement on social media in a specific physical setting as well as political, social and economic context (Stake, 2000: 438). NTV Uganda is a privately-owned television station with massive Facebook following currently at second position (1,357,273 followers) in the country after Nile Broadcasting Services (NBS) Television at 1,519,134 followers. Below is a breakdown of the distribution of Facebook followers across some of the top television stations in the country:

Table 2: Facebook followers across some of the top television stations in Uganda

Television station	Facebook followers
NBS	1,519,134
NTV	1,357,273
Bukedde Television (1)	700,273
Spark Television	552,015
BBS Telefayina	330,339
Urban Television	241,879

Source: socialbakers.com

Whereas NBS has a bigger Facebook following in comparison to NTV, the study prioritised NTV because of its known criticism of the state and its machinery. NTV Uganda is one of the television stations seen to be critical of government, and has had a rough relationship with the state. The state onslaught on dissent saw the station being shut down in 2007. The explanation given for the shutdown of NTV then was that the national broadcaster, Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, did not have the capacity to accommodate NTV's transmission equipment. In addition, the station has in the past been banned from covering or reporting about the head of state. In 2014 for instance, the station was banned from covering President Museveni after showing videos of him asleep during a session in parliament. The government's Media Centre explained that the head of state was not sleeping but was mediating, one of his known habits⁸. This history places NTV Uganda as an interesting case for analysis particularly in the context of news dissemination through social media platforms. In addition, and as will be explained in subsequent chapters, the amount of planning that went into populating NTV's Facebook page with content ahead of the 2016 elections further presents it as a worthy site for research in understanding how this content was engaged with by netizens in the context of a public sphere.

The period of study was the peak political highlight in Uganda—the 2016 presidential elections. The NTV Uganda Facebook page and the activities of its followers are analysed in context of the political setting of this period when most people are engaged in the national political discourse. The television station is thus considered as an 'instrumental case study' (Stake, 2000: 437), in which the unit of investigation is of secondary importance. NTV Uganda's Facebook page in this situation provides insight to an external interest. This contrasts with what Stake (2000) describes as an intrinsic case study in which the researcher's interest lies in analysing a given case, as opposed to using that case for analysis of generic phenomenon.

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/19/uganda-museveni-tv-ban-asleep>

In-depth interviews

This study used interviews to gather further data in addition to netnography explained above. An interview is a ‘practical qualitative method of discovering how people think and feel about their communication practices’ (Keyton, 2006: 269). In-depth interviews are necessary especially in incidences where the subject of investigation cannot be directly observed. This may include events that are in the past. Interviews are also important in getting people to talk about the meanings they attach to what happens around them, and by interviewing these people a researcher gets the opportunity to appreciate their perspective (Patton, 2002: 341). This is in line with this research, which seeks to analyse how Facebook followers engage with the political discourse on the platform. In addition to the need for theoretical and contextual knowledge about the subject, Keyton (2006: 269) advises that researchers ought to possess communication skills in order to enable them conduct successful interviews. This researcher’s background as a journalist in Uganda was useful in enabling the productive interview sessions. In discussing the advantages of in-depth interviews, Roger Wimmer and Joseph Dominick (2003: 127) explain that interviews allow for lengthy observations of non-verbal responses, and are also suitable for small sample sizes. This makes it possible to structure the interview questions in a manner that allows each respondent to answer different questions. This eventually leads to detailed information especially since each response can generate another question on its own. In-depth-interviews are more reliable in providing accurate responses to sensitive topics, mainly because of the rapport created between the interviewer and interviewee.

For this research, journalists, editors and online content managers were interviewed for their views on use of the Facebook platform. Wimmer and Dominick (2003) nonetheless caution that in-depth interviews expose the interviewer to bias while questioning and this bias can be detected by the interviewee. Although the impact of such bias on the interviewee cannot be ascertained, it is something worth guarding against. Irrespective of the shortcomings of in-depth interviews, they were ideal for supplementing this netnographic study. To guard against the limitations of in-depth interviews, the researcher used an interview guide during the sessions (see Appendix G, H and J).

Sampling

Making a sample selection for the Facebook data

As discussed above, Facebook presents with big data and this necessitates the selection of a sample for analysis. Such a sample would be a subset representative enough of the entire population (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 84). Sampling is done to accommodate constraints in time and resource for studying the entire populations. Wimmer and Dominick (2003) discuss two broad categories of sampling, probability and non-probability. Probability samples avail an equal chance for each unit to get selected and are based on mathematical guidelines unlike the non-probability samples. As noted by Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis (2003: 78), a non-probability sample necessitates that a researcher deliberately selects particular units to reflect certain desired features of the sampled population. Sampling is in this case therefore not meant to derive a statistically representative unit. The selection considers certain defined traits and characteristics of the population to derive a suitable unit for deeper analysis. The ability to select preferred units implies that non-probability samples can be conveniently applied to small scale in-depth studies (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). This research adopts non- probability sampling to allow for purposive sampling of the Facebook data.

Selecting a sample size

The process of sampling further implies that a representative sample size needs to be derived. Such a size would be the exact number of people to be analysed and make meaningful conclusions as informed by the study objectives (Keyton, 2006: 130). This process therefore calls for a thorough analysis of a small qualitative sample/unit, since additional units will hardly avail new evidence (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 83). In addition, prevalence is not of concern for qualitative research, implying the absence of a requirement for the sample to be of sufficient scale to determine statistically significant discriminatory variables. These scholars further argue that since qualitative studies yield information that is rich in detail, sample sizes need to be kept small to be manageable. They advise that qualitative samples for a single study involving individual interviews only often lie under 50, lest they become difficult to manage in relation to

quality of data collection and analysis. These scholars nonetheless caution that samples should not be too small, lest they miss key constituencies of the population. Small-scale samples work in qualitative research if good purposive or theoretical sampling has taken place (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 85). For this research, the researcher chose a sample size of 30 responses off Facebook as expounded below.

Because users of interactive media play an active role in adapting, altering, and producing content over a long period of time, the analysis and retrieval of this content can be difficult, partly because of its fluidity. In the initial stages of trying to observe the data on the NTV Facebook page, the researcher faced challenges. The researcher first tried to manually go through the NTV Facebook page and search for content dating to 2016. This involved scrolling down an endless number of pages to get to the desired year, months and days for analysis. At several points, the NTV Facebook page became unresponsive, necessitating the need for refreshing. Once refreshed the page would go back to the starting point. This is how cumbersome the observation process in this community (Facebook page) was.

And softer weeks of unsuccessful attempts at retrieving the data set, it made sense to collect it all off the Facebook page at once. In order to achieve this, the researcher approached NTV and requested for retrieval, which was done through social news desk dashboard. The availed data set included stories posted by NTV on the Facebook page everyday throughout the months of January and February 2016. In addition, all the comments from followers of the page to each of these stories were availed. The data set was so enormous that it was impossible to analyse all the interactions. A strategy was therefore devised to limit the scope. It should be noted that the requested and availed data was specifically textual data off the Facebook page, and not posted videos, images, etc, to enable for a discourse analysis as explained below.

Handling the ‘big data’

The heterogeneous, fast changing space of online participants on the NTV Facebook page means it is difficult and unnecessary to achieve a sample in the statistical sense, since the study is qualitative. Also the enormity of followers on the NTV Uganda Facebook page made it

impossible to observe all the interactions, which were updated by the minute. For example, a total of 1,300 comments were posted for the first week of January 2016 alone. If this were to be taken as a baseline, a total of 5, 200 comments would have to be analysed for this month. The situation is even more intense for the month of February where the week of elections alone availed a total of 4, 765 comments for analysis. At best, one could hope to analyse a satisfactory range of posts, sufficient to give a sense of this space's complexity. As Skalski *et. al.* (2017:204) note, scientists are usually concerned that volumes of big data used for research pose the risk of ignoring principles of representative sampling, especially when a study opts for a deductive approach. Nonetheless, a discursive analysis of interactive media was still possible since content analysis methodologies can be applicable to the most challenging of messages.

Given the enormity of the data, Facebook posts included in the study were purposely selected. According to Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis and Gillian Elam (2003:78) purposive selection implies that the chosen sample has desirable characteristics to allow for detailed research exploration. This sampling strategy recognises researcher judgment in identifying the relevant units or in this case the Facebook comments that would best answer the research objectives. This selection of components that best answer research objectives is an advantage of purposive sampling (Saunders *et. al* 2009: 237). In analysing the NTV Facebook page, specific content emanating from news stories that were related to the 2016 elections only, was desired.

To get to a more realistic sample size within the above two months, the following was done: for the month of January, only stories that attracted the highest responses in the first week were considered. The week span from Friday 1 to Thursday 7 January 2016. The researcher intended to retrieve the comments posted on Facebook as far back as possible for the selected period of study. The intention was to examine the nature of engagement prior to the election dates. This made the first week of January more viable. To further arrive at a manageable sample, only stories that attracted at least 100 comments were considered for analysis. If a particular day had several stories with comments at 100 and above, the story selected for analysis would be the one that has the highest number of comments. The researcher was convinced that the issues under discussion in such a story would present more diversity in opinion and therefore a good basis for examining the nature of engagement on Facebook, as opposed to stories with fewer comments.

The considered comments had to be written mainly in English and in non-abusive language. If a comment had one or two words in any of the local languages, these were considered negligible and the comment was considered for analysis. Negligible was in this case interpreted by the researcher to mean that these few words did not affect the overall message of engagement conveyed by the person posting.

Table 3 shows the inclusion criteria: the day and week of publication (shaded) and the number of comments represented by the number in the shaded box. In bold are the final stories selected for analysis. In brown ink are the election days.

Table 3: Selection of stories for January and February 2016

Jan	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Week1					132	61 86	17 23 142
Week2		100 174 38 40	183 212	33 59			
Week3							
Week4							
Feb	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Week1							
Week2							299
Week3	131 170	40 119	15 50 35 28 19 58 05 11	29 44 113 149 04 05 45 422	84 18 260 110 85 28	161 339 179 539 251 290 151	

			93	29 50 07 18			
Week4							

NTV Uganda published a total of 14 stories related to the presidential elections (not parliamentary) in the first week of January 2016. Following the above criteria for selecting stories that attracted at least 100 comments for inclusion, a total of six stories out of the 14 published in this period were identified as particularly relevant. To further narrow the sample, the top four stories with the highest number of comments were selected. For a day of the week with more than one posted story, a story that attracted the highest number of comments on this day was considered for inclusion. Furthermore, for each of the four selected stories, only the first 30 comments were considered. The choice of 30 comments was informed by the argument that qualitative samples often lie under 50, if they are to be managed (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The researcher therefore, analysed a total of 120 comments for the month of January, taking 30 views only for each of the four selected stories.

A criterion similar to the one used in January was used for selection of stories for inclusion during the month of February. The only variation was that the researcher considered the election week of this month, which span from Sunday 14 to Saturday 20 February 2016. Since this research is about the 2016 elections, the researcher considered this week as the most appropriate in examining the nature of engagement on Facebook then. In addition, this week enabled the researcher to examine the comments during the election days, 18 and 19 February (indicated with the orange highlight in Table 3 above), and shortly after the elections.

For this week, a total of 39 stories were published on the NTV Facebook platform. The selection of stories that attracted at least 100 comments availed a total of 16 stories for consideration. Out of these, the top four stories with the highest number of comments were selected, as was done for January. In instances where several stories were published in a single day, the story which attracted the highest number of comments was considered over the others. For each of the four

stories that eventually made the selection list, only the first 30 comments were considered. This resulted in a total of 120 comments to be analysed for the month of February too. The researcher was convinced that the total of 240 comments from both January and February 2016 were sufficient to answer the research questions.

Sampling of interview respondents

To augment the Facebook posts, in-depth interviews were conducted with three categories of professional staff at NTV namely, the news editors, online content managers and journalists. The researcher used a census sampling method to include an entire population of respondents (Bhanu Sigdel, 2011)⁹. This decision was informed by the fact that newsrooms are usually comprised of a considerably small number of staff. Those selected were directly involved in the 2016 presidential elections in Uganda. A total of 11 respondents were interviewed. Of these, four were editors of the news bulletins at NTV, three were online content managers and four were journalists.

The editors are in charge of the daily newsroom meetings where strategies on how news is sourced are laid. The journalists' responsibility is to report and file stories. It is these stories about the 2016 elections that were posted on the NTV Facebook page to generate engagement with the online audience. The journalists participated in the Facebook engagements by way of giving clarification on posted stories when required. The three online content managers available for the interviews oversaw the posting of these stories. In addition, the online content managers had the mandate of controlling the conversation on the aforementioned Facebook page.

The interview process

The interviews were conducted in April 2018 at the NTV main offices at Kampala Serena Hotel and at its annex offices at Airtel House, Kampala. Most of the respondents were interviewed in their respective offices. Only one respondent preferred to be interviewed in their car, which was

⁹<https://bhanusigdel.wordpress.com/2011/11/17/census-and-sampling-method/>

parked at the Serena offices. This respondent was more comfortable speaking away from the confines of the office. The researcher held interviews in the venues that respondents recommended, to allow for comfort and consequent gathering of enough details (Creswell 2003:18). In addition, it was important that the respondents recommend venues most convenient to them and not to the researcher (Yin, 2011:32).

In conducting the interviews, the researcher worked with four research assistants. Interview guides that were structured to ask questions pertinent to the research objectives, were used in the interview process. These interview guides were customised to suit the different categories of respondents. The researcher ensured that ample rapport was created with the respondents to allow for lengthy exploration of the research questions (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 127). Respondents gave detailed explanations from which the researcher noted follow-up questions related to the research objectives for purposes of clarity. As noted by Saunders *et al.* (2009), interviews help in the collection of valid and reliable data, deemed relevant to research questions and objectives. Each of the interviews lasted between 1-2 hours, and was conversational to allow respondents recollect and narrate the events (Yin, 2011:32). An audio recording of all interviews was made and transcribed verbatim. The transcription was done by the research assistants and double-checked by the researcher to ensure consistence of the transcriptions and audio recordings. These transcriptions were used in the final analysis of data to sieve out relevant responses.

One of the setbacks encountered during the interview process was a faulty recorder at the start of the very first interview. Luckily, both the researcher and research assistant were recording with their phones for backup. After this incident, the team was more cautious in checking that the recorders were in good condition. In addition, phones continued to be used to record for backup.

The other challenge was last-minute cancellation of interviews by respondents. Two journalists who had assented to the interviews later cancelled and informed the researcher that they had to go cover some breaking news. One of them managed to reschedule the interview and came through on the agreed date. Unfortunately, the other journalist postponed indefinitely.

Data analysis

This study combined two fields of analysis: discourse analysis and thematic analysis to enable deeper subjective interpretation of Facebook use in Uganda. Discourse analysis was important in locating the study in the broader debates of how power is enacted through discourse or the control thereof in Uganda. Thematic analysis was applied in the study to organise and categorise the engagement on Facebook. Each of these applications is explained in detail below.

Discourse analysis

The subjective interpretation of research findings necessitates this study to first and foremost anchor in an understanding of discourse as it relates to power. By presenting Facebook as a platform for contending factions and each of them demonstrating the power they have at their disposal, the study finds connections to theorists of discourse and power. The seminal works of Michel Foucault in understanding how power is enacted through discourse, becomes a reference point. Foucault remains an authority on the question of power in relation to discourse (McHoul and Wendy Grace, 1993: 22). He argues for a productive application of power as opposed to a repressive one. Such an application would imply that power does not carry the force of prohibition. Foucault raises the question on whether power would be obeyed if it were always saying 'no'. For Foucault, power is accepted not because it always says no, but because it induces pleasure and produces discourse (Gordon, 1980: 119). His understanding of the concept of power therefore seeks to analyse the mechanics of power.

This approach deviates from earlier postulations of power for example by Marxists who understood it as domination by class. The focus on mechanics of power allows for an analysis of the struggles of ordinary people whose lives are impacted by the web of power, and consequently a deeper understanding of the nature of power (Gordon, 1980:116). This approach to power by Foucault explains why he prioritises the question on how power installs itself and the effects that come with such exertion, as opposed to the question of who wields the power. He consequently locates power outside conscious decisions by individuals, who are viewed as conduits for the demonstration of power (McHoul and Grace, 1993:21). However, Miller (1990:116) castigates

Foucault for using discourse to deny the possibility of an independent existing reality of the world. Miller argues that discourse is not and cannot be sufficient in explaining the world. He nonetheless acknowledges that discourse has had major contributions such as a worldly projection of institutions of social life. Seumas Miller (1990:115) notes too that the term discourse is inherently resident in non-literary disciplines such as historiography and cultural studies, most of which are associated with Michel Foucault.

Foucault therefore conceives discourse theory as a foundation of grammar and as a theory of knowledge. In discussing the segments of this theory, he explains that the theory has invented itself in an empirical knowledge of grammatical forms but also as an analytic of finitude (Foucault, 1989: 366- 367). The application of the term discourse in this thesis and as espoused by Foucault relates to discourse as a body of knowledge and not as it is applied in the linguistic sense or by linguistic studies. As noted by Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace (1993:26), Foucault applies this term both as a scholarly discipline and also in reference to disciplinary institutions of social control such as prisons. McHoul and Wendy Grace (1993) note further that discourse as interpreted by Foucault therefore finds relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control).

Discourse analysis is not only a method for doing social research but is also a body of empirical knowledge about how talk and text are organised. Several theories about the nature and application of communications, and of construction and reproduction of social reality find anchorage in discourse analysis (Cameron, 2001:13). As explained by Louise Phillips and Marianne Jorgensen (2002:1), “discourse analysis is not just one approach. It is a series of interdisciplinary approaches that can be used to explore many different social domains in many different types of studies. And there is no clear consensus on what discourses are and how to analyse them.” The above description effectively presents discourse analysis as a perspective on social life that incorporates both methodological and conceptual elements. Discourse analysis is therefore in essence an alternative to both conventional methodologies and to the perspectives in which those methodologies are embedded. These multiple perspectives have the consequence of availing multiple definitions of discourse and what counts as discourse. The most common ones are discourse as spoken language, written language, and language use beyond the level of the

sentence (Wood and Kroger, 2000:3). The study relied on the properties of discourse analysis for further understanding of Facebook as a speech community in Uganda and therefore the dominant discourse on the platform.

In this study, discourse analysis is applied as a method of inquiry. The popularity of discourse analysis as a qualitative research method in the social sciences is increasing (Cameron, 2001:13). Its application in this study is within the ethnography and consequently the netnographic presentation and analysis of Facebook. The discussion in the next paragraphs therefore draws on discourse analysis' multi-disciplinarily nature to discuss discourse and power as it relates to the media, politics and society in general. This breakdown is important for the study, which as discussed earlier, presents Facebook as a battleground for hegemony by the state, the media and ordinary people or Facebook followers/netizens.

Political discourse analysis and the media

As with previous interpretive studies on Facebook which explored how the platform is used and how it affects social relationships (Bosch, 2017:67), this study used a critical discursive thematic analysis to examine how followers (netizens) engaged with the 2016 Ugandan presidential elections discourse on the NTV Uganda's Facebook page. This effectively locates the study in political discourse analysis, a field of discourse analysis, which focuses on discourse in political forums.

Halperin and Heath (2017: 336) define discourse analysis as an interpretive approach to understanding political phenomena that draws on diverse theories and methodologies. The analysis is based on a premise that language is a form of social practice whose close analysis can reveal issues of power asymmetries, inequality, exploitation, particularly how the social power (abuse) is enacted, reproduced and resisted (Fairclough, 1995; Dijk, 2001). As Dijk (2001) argues, hypotheses linking discourse to power can be investigated through an analysis of how the powerful groups control public discourse, and how actions of the less powerful groups conform or resist that control. As observed by Cameron (2001:123) discourse analysis is applicable to both talk and text especially those that are institutional in nature. Cameron adds that the media are

important sites for the operation of discourse from the perspective of social theorists. The media is therefore a platform through which power exchanges or excesses are demonstrated. The manner in which NTV Uganda engages with its followers on its Facebook page is examined from this perspective. Studies on discourse partly concern themselves with the way that power is enacted, expressed, described, concealed or legitimated by text and talk in the social context (Dijk, 2008: 27).

Thematic analysis

Here the six steps of interpretive thematic analysis suggested by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) were employed. As noted by Braun and Clarke, (2006: 78-79), thematic analysis allows for the identification, analysis and eventual reporting of patterns within the data. This therefore implies that it can be used for interpreting different sections of a given research topic. Braun and Clarke further note that the flexibility and absence of clear guidelines on how to go about thematic analysis means that researchers can apply it differently to suit a given study. In addition, thematic analysis suits the interpretivist research paradigm. As an interpretivist method, Braun and Clarke (2006:81) note that thematic analysis examines the ways in which events and experiences result from several discourses operating in society. For this study, discursive thematic analysis is used to examine the nature of engagement between and among the public as they respond to NTV news content on the television's Facebook page.

Thematic analysis involves identifying patterns of themes relevant to the phenomenon under study, wherein a theme reflects important aspects of the data in relation to the research question (Fereday, 2006:82). Basing on the epistemological position of interpretivism, the researcher inductively identified themes to help in answering the research questions. Inductive thematic analysis relates to the ability to identify themes linked to the data and not trying to fit themes into predetermined coding frames (Braun and Clarke, 2006:83). The inductive identification of themes was an iterative process guided by the six steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke, which include: 1) Familiarising yourself with the data, 2) Generating initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4) Reviewing themes, 5) Defining and naming themes and 6) Producing the report. This data analysis process is explained below.

To begin with, the researcher read the data transcribed by the research assistants to ensure consistence with the audio recording from the interview participants. In instances where a mismatch was detected, it was corrected. In addition, the researcher needed to familiarise herself with the issues pointed out by the interviewees (news editors, journalists and on-line content managers) in relation to the research objectives. Furthermore, the researcher scanned through the folders of Facebook content for the months of January and February 2016 as availed by NTV. This enabled the identification of stories that were particularly about the 2016 presidential elections. The researcher noted that several stories were covered during this period and as the polling day drew near, more than one story was posted on some of these days.

In addition, thousands of comments were registered in reaction to these stories. These comments were diverse in nature, depicting voices in favour of and those against the issues raised in the posted news content. This implied that a sampling criterion had to be developed for the stories and the ensuing comments from the Facebook followers. The exact manner in which this was done has already been explained above under ‘handling the big data’. The identified stories and comments were then tabulated using Microsoft Word to enable the identification of patterns and eventual themes. The tabulation captured the following aspects: the story title and date of posting by NTV, comments from followers, nature of engagement and finally the response from NTV. Below is a section of the thematic tabulation of the Facebook data:

Thematic analysis of engagement on the NTV Facebook Page 2016

Table 4: A section of the thematic analysis of NTV Facebook data

Story title and date of posting by NTV	Comments from followers	Nature of engagement:	Response from NTV
		-Acceptance of news content -Resistance of news content -Followers in agreement -Followers in disagreement	
January 1, 2016 Mbabazi expresses concerns over being shadowed by unknown men. <i>132 Comments</i>	Mbabazi should know that more is still to come and he will soon understand the true meaning of being a member of opposition in Uganda. When he was enjoying the comfort of his long time friend, Dr. Besigye was sprayed, his finger was shot.	Resistance of news content	
	Great view	Followers in agreement	
	And Mbabazi never condemned the above, he even geared the formulation of POMA to suffocate opposition rallies; now it's his turn to feel it.	Followers in agreement	
	great	Followers in agreement	

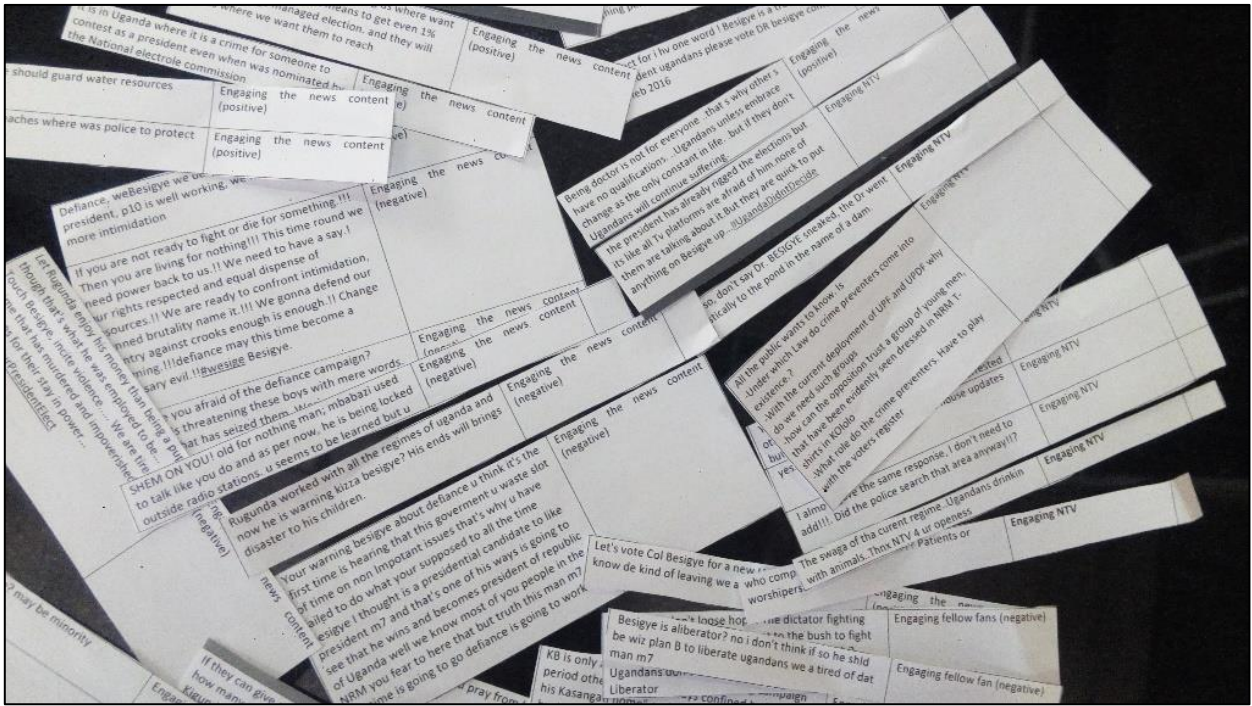
	wise Ugandans still exist		
	We are keeping a very close eye on Yoweri Museveni. God help him if any harm comes to Amama Mbabazi. For so long M7 has got away with murder, this time it will be him poking the behind of a leopard as he infamously said	Followers in agreement	
	I'm waiting for Kayihura to arrest him or put 20 million as bounty to whoever gets him very sad for our country	Followers in agreement	
	How about Amama Mbabazi, you mean for him he hasn't gone away with some murders or you think the public forgot about the boyfriend to the daughter who was killed in cold blood at the kololo residence. Again why should you try to cut the hand that fed you, after stealing from the government now you want to protect whatever you stole..SHAME	Followers in disagreement	

In the above table, each comment from a follower of the page was categorised in relation to whether the person commenting was responding to the news content, or to an earlier post from

another follower on the page. In addition, the categorisation captured instances where followers were reaching out to NTV or if they chose to post their own comments, not related to the news story. This is what Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as collating codes into potential themes. The researcher developed the themes based on this coding. Further thematisation involved the review and regrouping of sub-themes into bigger and more meaningful themes. The above coding shows that followers of the page both resisted and accepted the news content. In addition, these followers were both in agreement and disagreement with each other on their respective posts, and also reached out to NTV with inquiries or compliments.

The above table was then printed and the sections on ‘comment from followers,’ and ‘nature of engagement’ cut out with a pair of scissors for ease of analysis. Further cuttings were made to enable grouping and subsequent counting of responses that belonged together. This manual process was double checked by the application of Nvivo software as described in the next section. The researcher found it necessary to apply both methods first of all to preserve the traditional coding of data, but secondly to double check the validity of data distribution using Nvivo as computer-assisted data analysis software. In addition, the thematic analysis process as shown in Table 4 above enabled the researcher to sieve through the data.

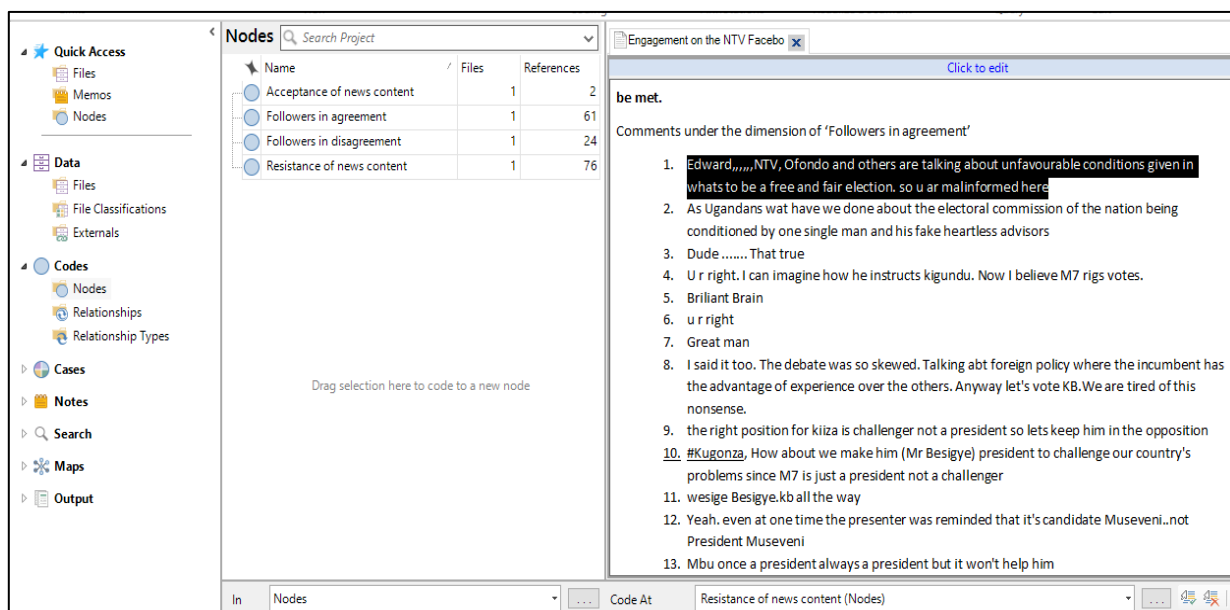
Figure 2: An image of a section of the paper cuttings



Application of Nvivo software

The discursive analytical process required the Facebook data to be organised and presented in meaningful patterns. From the Facebook page, each of the chosen comments for analysis were first organised under the relevant theme in a word document (see Appendix C). These themes emerged from the thematic analysis process described above and shown in Table 4. The word document, which showed the overall nature of engagement on Facebook was then imported into Nvivo 12 software to enable visualisation. This software can be used in the analysis of text, images, audio and video in research methods such as discourse analysis, thematic analysis, network analysis and ethnography (Caldwell, 2018: 197). Figure 4.2 below is a screenshot of the Nvivo coding process:

Figure 3: Coding of Facebook data in Nvivo

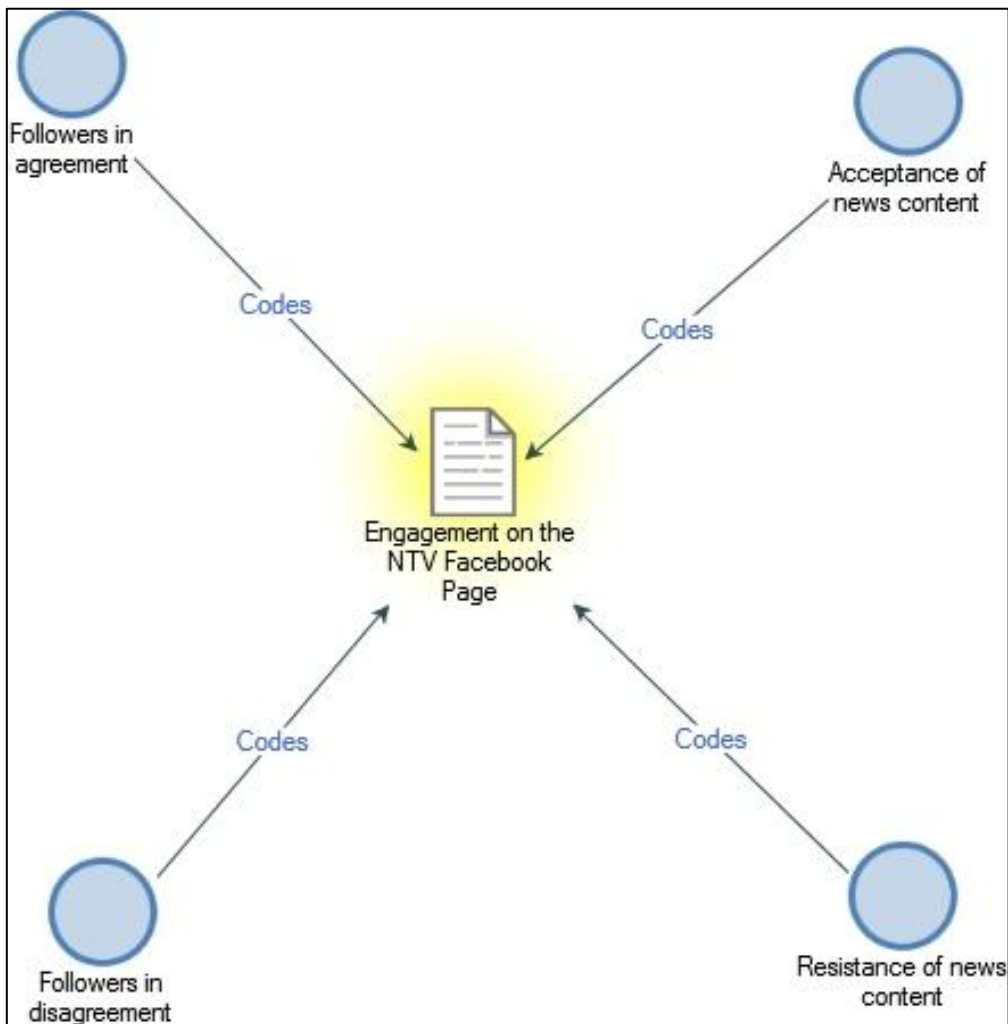


For this netnographic research, employing aspects of discourse analysis and thematic analysis for data interpretation, the Nvivo software was useful in the management and visualisation of big data from the NTV Facebook page. This data was then discursively analysed from an interpretive thematic analytical approach.

The data that was imported into Nvivo was then coded under appropriate nodes (codes). Nodes allow for the central collection of similar elements, from which researchers then identify patterns and ideas (Caldwell, 2018: 22). For this study, these nodes were labelled as per the identified research themes developed in the thematic analysis of data. The nodes were consequently named as: resistance of news content, acceptance of news content, followers in agreement, and followers in disagreement.

Figure 4 below is the resultant Nvivo Explore diagram, showing the diversity of engagement on the Facebook page.

Figure 4: Nvivo explore diagram showing the diversity of engagement on the NTV Facebook page



This chapter has described the preferred research paradigm of constructivism and its particular application to this qualitative study. Basing on this paradigm, the researcher applied a discursive discourse thematic interpretation to the data in a bid to understand Facebook as a public sphere in Uganda. In addition, the chapter has described the methods of data collection and final sampling criteria for the choice of stories and comments analysed off the NTV Facebook page. This selection was considered highly important by the researcher because of the challenges that big volumes of data on social media in general and specifically Facebook, present to researchers.

Whereas NTV availed thousands of comments to the researcher off its Facebook page, only a representative sample could be used to answer the research questions. The next chapter is an interpretive analysis of the generated themes. The analysis is backed by both the theoretical underpinnings of the study and the empirical evidence from the in-depth interviews and Facebook data.

Chapter 5 Traditional media joins the Facebook public sphere

Introduction

Whereas Africa is yet to fully benefit from well-developed continent-specific literature and theorising on the concept of the public sphere (Caldwell, 2017: 121), this study attempts to address this gap in the context of Uganda. The subsequent chapters present empirical evidence on how Facebook can potentially be regarded as the new public sphere, allowing for free expression of views on political issues (Castells, 2008; Lim 2009) in Uganda. The platform is presented as a confluence of contending factions, namely, the media, the ordinary citizens and the state. Each of these factions is seen to join the Facebook communicative space to advance their interests and exercise power over the other two factions and consequently exercise power over discourse.

This thesis argued in chapter three that traditional media redeemed the public sphere. This, as already noted, is contrary to Habermas' (1989: 160) argument that the media was a major contributor to the collapse of the public sphere. For Habermas, the initially discursive public sphere is said to have become one of consumption of media content. Moreover, the rise of public relations and advertising are said to have made the public sphere both trivial and commercially motivated (Cushion, 2012). This situation was further compounded by the fact that less educated people were now drawn into the public sphere, with a consequence of negatively affecting the sphere's socio-discursive coherence. It is within these confines of Habermas' notion and those of subsequent writers that this study seeks an understanding of what the situation is for the case of Facebook as a public sphere. All the above actors, such as the media, ordinary citizens/followers, the state, corporate entities customised to advertising and public relations, and a capitalist society are present in the Facebook public sphere. This therefore presents the question on whether the presence of these actors will lead to the demise of the Facebook public sphere, as was the case with that alleged and decried by Habermas. The section that follows is particularly dedicated to understanding if the presence of traditional media is destined to cause the re-incarnation of the collapse of the public sphere as surmised by Habermas, redeem the public sphere through Facebook, or present another dimension not initially envisaged, in the context of Uganda.

The increasing use of social media in Uganda therefore probed this study to investigate the exact manner in which citizens, the media and the state engage on Facebook as one of the commonly used platforms in the country. The research sought to address the following objectives:

1. To determine how Nation Television used Facebook in engaging followers on the political discourse during Uganda's 2016 elections.
2. To examine the nature of engagement on Facebook as a public sphere.
3. To establish the ways in which television media and institutions of government interfere with public participation on Facebook.

This is the first of three chapters that present and discursively analyse the data from both the Facebook posts and the in-depth interviews conducted. The data is presented from a three-legged perspective situated in discourse analysis, thematic analysis and the study's theoretical underpinnings, namely the public sphere and agenda setting.

This chapter addresses the findings of the first research question which sought 'To determine how Nation Television used Facebook in engaging followers on the political discourse during Uganda's 2016 elections. The findings of the second and third research questions are presented in chapter six and seven respectively. Data from both the in-depth interviews and content off the Facebook page in relation to the entire research objective is presented and analysed from a subjective interpretation.

On the objective 'To determine how Nation Television used Facebook in engaging followers on the political discourse during Uganda's 2016 elections', the study found out a number of things. One of them is that NTV use Facebook as a news space. Secondly, the station used Facebook as a platform to set the agenda for national discourse. But as per the 2016 elections, the response to content from NTV was so overwhelming that the station had difficulty in coping with the volume of engagement. The study further discovered that there is a conflict of agendas and discourse among NTV and other entities present online. Finally, the study found out that NTV uses Facebook as an advertising platform. Each of these findings is explained in detail below.

How Nation Television used Facebook in engaging followers on the political discourse in Uganda

Figure 5: A photo of NTV's coverage of the electoral process



An image off NTV's Facebook page shows News Anchor, Josephine Karungi (Left) interviewing the Electoral Commission Spokesperson, Jotham Taremwa (Right) on 18 February 2016

Facebook as a news space

The research findings indicate that NTV used Facebook as a platform for dissemination of news updates on the 2016 elections. Aware of the power of social media and with the intention of using Facebook to extend the television station's influence/power, NTV made deliberate efforts to maintain a consistent flow of information online. This, as explained by one of the news editors and in relation to the 2016 elections, involved ensuring that all NTV staff had smart phones ahead of the elections.

A smart phone loan scheme was introduced. The idea was that every single person in the company would be able to update their social media platforms, and re-share as much content from NTV across their own platform. We would use it as a tool for newsgathering and news sharing. So, it meant that if you are at a scene of an accident, you did not have to come to the station to tell us to send a person. You could actually take a video and post it on our WhatsApp groups from wherever you are so that we are able to share that information as quick as possible. And probably one of the reasons as to why NTV had both the fastest growing Facebook page and the most followers on Twitter is because we kind of had a presence almost everywhere. As long as we had people in the field, we had content coming in. So, the loan scheme was very critical in allowing us share as much content from the field in both stills and videos from the different rallies where these candidates were during the campaigns (Respondent B, 17 April 2018).

This scheme allowed employees to pay up for the phones to the tune of UGX 3 million over a 12-month period. Specifically, for the journalists, the television station required of them to file stories on the go while in the field. These stories were then uploaded on Facebook as first priority, before the same were shared on air. The media have traditionally been known as a powerful institution for the propagation of national discourse through news and other current affairs.

Dijk (2008: 40) lists the media as one of the institutions of power in society alongside government, parliament, state agencies, the judiciary, the military, political parties, the church and institutions of education. The media arguably wields its power in several ways. One of these is by positioning itself as an authority on news and information. But the onset of social media and in this case Facebook threatens this media power since other users are at liberty to produce and share information. Faced with this reality, NTV was quick to ensure that it is present on Facebook purposely to use the platform for news sharing and gathering and out do those other players available in this space to avail information. As seen in the quote above from an NTV respondent, "...one of the reasons as to why NTV had both the fastest growing Facebook page and the most followers on Twitter is because we kind of had a presence almost everywhere." This way, the followers on the NTV Facebook page continued to look forward to the updates,

regardless of the fact that Facebook is populated by news feeds from other users. Consequently, NTV successfully used Facebook as a news space in the period of Uganda's 2016 elections and arguably maintained its power base as an authority on information in society.

The second manner in which media institutions wield power is by amplifying the talk of other power institutions and persons. By doing this, the power of these institutions is legitimated. But whilst the media avails such a platform to these talkers, its role goes beyond that of a mediating power. The media in this respect also further entrenches its own power (Dijk, 2008:55). Journalists portray the power of others in as much as they portray that of their respective media organisations. To ensure that this amplification of other voices was consistently maintained, NTV employed additional staff to attend to the social media platforms including running live updates.

Previously we had just about two people running the social media platforms. I will take you back to about early 2015. So, we had one social media executive and one online editor. In the run up to elections, we had to recruit another social media executive but also put together the digital department. Previously, the web master was independent of the social media platforms. Twitter and Facebook were run by our social media executive and the online editor. The web master was just running the website and directly reporting to me, independent of the others. We merged the web master, social media executives and online editor. We had recruited one extra executive. So we had four people responsible for running the entire digital platforms. It meant that we had to work around the shift plans, in which we needed to have had two people work per six hours and be available to run regular updates on all the platforms. These included the website, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and in some cases Instagram. But it was also the first time to do all the six platforms. Previously we were more interested in the website, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, however we were also streaming live all the content that was being shared on air. We were sharing content on the go(Respondent B, 17 April 2018).

Whereas NTV amplified the voices of various players during the 2016 elections, the necessity for NTV to share information live confirms what Rodney-Gumede (2017: 281) asserts, that journalists are now compelled to produce news at a rate similar to how fast information circulates on social

media. This further implies that journalists and media personnel are now required to possess multimedia expertise and integrate social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009; Dwyer, 2010; Cushion, 2012). The demand by NTV that its journalists post stories on the instant for consequent uploading on Facebook and other social media is further confirmation of the convergence of traditional and social media platforms.

Facebook as a platform for agenda setting

It is ironic that whereas NTV populated its Facebook page with content and even hired more staff to manage the page, it did not respond to any of the queries raised by followers. In coding the activity off the NTV Facebook page, this study established that the television station did not respond to its followers. As earlier seen in Table 4 (a section of which is replicated below and renamed Table 5), the column on ‘Response from NTV’ remained blank. The researcher purposefully included this column to record any response or engagement between NTV and its followers, but from the data set that was analysed, the column had no entries.

Table 5: Selection of stories for January and February 2016

Story title and date posted by NTV	Comments from followers	Nature of engagement: <i>- Acceptance of news content</i> <i>- Resistance of news content</i> <i>- Followers in agreement</i> <i>- Followers in disagreement</i>	Response from NTV
January 1, 2016 Mbabazi expresses concerns over being shadowed by unknown men. <i>132 Comments</i>	Mbabazi should know that more is still to come and he will soon understand the true meaning of being a member of opposition in Uganda. When he was enjoying the comfort of his longtime friend, Dr. Besigye was sprayed, his finger was shot.	Resistance of news content	
	Great view	Followers in agreement	
	And Mbabazi never condemned the above, he even geared the formulation of POMA to suffocate opposition rallies; now	Followers in agreement	

	it's his turn to feel it.		
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Whereas social media is inherently interactive and avails opportunities for media houses to engage with audiences in a back and forth conversation, this engagement is absent on the NTV Facebook page. The non-responsiveness on the side of NTV is interpreted to imply that the television has carried its traditional agenda-setting role into the public sphere of Facebook, to disseminate information in a one-way process. In this process, the television station continues to populate the Facebook page with content, followers of the page engage with this content and sometimes ask questions, yet no response from NTV is registered.

Traditional media is known to disseminate information and set the agenda for public discourse. In this role, traditional media positions itself as an authority on events and public happenings. This role carries with it an embedded implication of non-reciprocity between traditional media and its audiences in as far as switching such positions is concerned. This means that the audience is mainly considered as recipients of that which is constructed or interpreted by the media, and not vice versa. The responses from the in-depth interviews with three news editors at NTV, as presented below, confirm that the focus on agenda setting took precedent:

We were more pushing than engaging. We had more content going out than engaging the different audiences on those platforms. We were happy to say that we are the first to give you this information but we were not as good at going back there and saying what is this person asking about, what are they saying, how many messages do we have in our inbox, have we cleared them (Respondent B, 17 April 2018).

What usually happens is, if let's say we post something in error, then we would immediately correct, delete and then offer correction. However, usually the weakness comes in if somebody asks for clarification. So sometimes we would leave it up to the person running the social media desk to make judgment or to say you guys there is this thing I think we need to respond to. If they do raise that issue then we say okay, you

respond in this way. But again it depends on whether they are able to raise that issue. If they do not raise it for whatever reasons, then it goes unanswered. I believe they are overwhelmed because you can have somebody work from 8 or 9am up to 6 pm. And that person is running everything. Remember apart from the news, they are also supposed to be posting content for the other production programmes that we have and commenting. People are also raising issues that side, so they are also supposed to be responding to that. It's just that the task is enormous for such a lean team (Respondent A, 14 April 2018).

In the past, this station has ever been closed by government. On many occasions, the head of state has cautioned NTV to watch out. So sometimes you want to play it safe. Now that does not stop you from fulfilling the responsibility of generating debate on social media pages and leaving it at that. Let people debate and [you] take a back seat, but remember the content of debate came from us. So basically, you look at something that can create some kind of talk-ability (Respondent C, 13 April 2018).

From the above submissions, television is arguably seen not only to set the agenda but also to attempt to exercise power over national discourse by availing topics for discussion and not engaging followers over these topics. The television station is yet to fully accommodate the possibility of sharing this assumed power over availing both the topics for discussion and engaging citizens online over the same. The station seems to be comfortable generating content, pushing it out and only coming in to rectify errors, but not to engage the netizens. As noted by Aruguete (2017:36, 42), new media platforms threaten traditional media's ability to steer the public agenda. This is so because these platforms allow for unrestricted alternative sources of information.

The above testimonies by the editors confirm that television has joined the online public sphere of Facebook to use it as a space to set the agenda for national discourse and further entrench its power as an authority on discourse. Consequently, television is not coming into this space as an equal participant. This is contrary to the arguments that Facebook is a public sphere, and therefore congregants are expected to join this space on equal footing. Instead, television comes

in as a ‘superior’ to dictate the discursive agenda. As argued by McCombs (2014: 2) in the agenda setting theory, news media are successful in telling their audiences not what to think, but what to think about. By implication, television uses Facebook to exert its dominance and extend its mass media logic. This is what Dijk (2001) implies in postulations about how powerful groups control public discourse. NTV, taking on the position of a ‘powerful’ media entity, is therefore seen to attempt to control public discourse by influencing the discursive agenda. However, as will be seen in the next chapter, the netizens resist this control in various ways.

Overwhelming response and the inability to cope

Although the television station employed additional staff to handle the social media platforms, it can be argued that NTV underestimated the volume of responses that come from social media. The respondents in charge of managing these platforms explained that the staffing levels were still insufficient. This insufficiency meant that timely response to many of the concerns raised by followers of the page could not be effected. In the interviews, two online content managers confirmed that indeed the volume of activity was beyond measure, but that they sometimes answered queries sent through the inbox and not on the public page:

The audiences we have online keep sending messages and asking questions. We follow the comments, the challenge is that at times they are way too many comments. You put up a post and suddenly you have about 500 comments and you have just a window of say 10 minutes just to engage with that particular audience. I think 10 staff would be sufficient to cover the platforms (Respondent E, 19 April 2018).

We discussed it and thought for purposes of making this whole thing as interactive and as participatory as possible, we would let it go unmoderated and hope that people stick to the issues and thankfully for the most part, they did. And having somebody to read through everything would require a full-time job which we did not have man power for at that time (Respondent F, 24 April 2018).

To the researcher, this insufficiency is further evidence that less priority was given to ample staffing, since agenda setting was preferred. The recruitment of additional staff to handle the online platforms only served in ensuring that these platforms were constantly populated with news updates. Shortage of competent staff during elections is one of the known dilemmas for the media, especially since audiences expect the media to be ubiquitous (Frère, 2010: 4). At the height of the 2016 elections, NTV was faced with this dilemma which was compounded by the fact that ample preparation for the vibrancy and engagement on social media was not prioritised. Consequently, some of the already insufficient staff to handle social media were often asked to multi-task by going out to the field to source news content for the platforms. As explained by one of them below, the sourced content was for populating social media platforms:

Occasionally, I would go out of the office and especially for the small Kampala events like press conferences to cover the stories myself and still be able to update in real time. For example, they would send me out if there was like a protest usually near our area, near Serena or the parliament. I covered a few of those, and press conferences from Amama Mbabazi's home. Sometimes it was because again resources. If everyone is upcountry and you only have a few people, but also I think because the editors would recognise certain people's traits or like you know how some people may not be able to tweet. Even if they have a Smartphone for some reason, it is taking them a bit longer to adapt. So they are like, let us send someone who can tweet. I was not required to file because it was specifically for social media. Just for social media purposes(Respondent G, 20 April 2018).

It is understandable that NTV was anxious to keep increasing the numbers of its Facebook followers during the 2016 elections, partly by keeping the platform populated. As observed by Freedman (2010: 35), audiences of news organisations are on a decline in the face of increasing competition from new types of suppliers, consequently pointing to the near collapse of the existing news environment. This nearing collapse owes to the fact that audiences are deserting them for the immediacy and interactivity of the Internet. These new types of suppliers that Freedman speaks of are on the Internet and in substantial numbers. This implies that for a television station to effectively compete for the attention of the divided online audience, its

platforms ought to be constantly updated. Fortunato and Martin (2016: 130) agree with Freedman and note that the media's inherent role of informing citizens has now become more challenging. This is especially so because technology allows individuals and organisations to use social media to directly reach the desired audience in times of elections and other periods. In addition, Fortunato and Martin (2016) assert that the agenda setting process is now influenced by a combination of the new technological communication options, distribution of messages through traditional mass media and advertising.

A conflict of agendas and discourse

But as television attempts to set the agenda, it is met with competing agendas of other players who are online to hold discussions on Facebook as a public sphere. These players present their own perspective of things, resulting into a conflict of agendas amongst the television, Facebook followers and state actors as per this study. These diverse agendas are what McCombs (2005: 544) refers to as 'a multiplicity of agendas.' In essence, this is a conflict of discourse, with each of the 'powers' present online, fronting what they feel should be the dominant discourse.

A case in point is the story posted on 18 February 2016 in which state actors explain the social media shut down on the day of the elections. The story reads, "ED UCC, Godfrey Mutabazi says Mobile Money and social media were shut down because there was information that people were using these to bribe voters.' In reaction to this story, one of the followers introduces a different aspect of the elections and posts, "*There are no ballots in opposition strongholds, be fair as we transition from H.E M7 to our DR.BESIGYE.*" This post is picked up by other followers concerned about the absence of ballots:

The government has failed to disperse voting material in time at the polling stations but can manage to cut off and sensor the media because it can!!! If this isn't an outright abuse of power and violation of people's freedoms I don't know what it is then. People who are still voting need to notice this and vote to change the situation in our country. This abuse of power should stop. #votethedictatorout.

The interpretation of such posts of user preferences is that even in the face of media's attempts at online agenda setting, people still use Facebook as a public sphere where they are at liberty to bring other topics for discussion. This demonstrates that they have agency in deciding topics and the direction of discourse, further emphasizing the argument that Facebook is a public sphere for free expression of views, not as dictated by the media's agenda.

In describing this situation of competing agendas, which are further understood in this study as competing struggles for hegemony over discourse, Fairclough (1998: 147) critiques the media for not being the obvious place for the demonstration and determination of professional political discourse. This is because the media itself is involved in what Fairclough describes as a "power struggle to achieve hegemony." This struggle, Fairclough argues further, is reflected both internally and externally. The external reflection relates to the articulation of different systems and orders of discourse. The internal one, which is of concern to this study, manifests in the overall order of discourse of the political system which is also often a struggle between political parties and political tendencies. The media's involvement in this political discourse mixes the elements of the orders of the political system with journalistic discourse. It is this mixing of the aforementioned elements that Fairclough (1998: 148- 49) critiques the media for, because it has implications on how well the media represents the hybridity of the general political scape. Meanwhile, the Facebook followers, oblivious of the media's internal power struggles carry on with using the platform as a public sphere. These followers arguably treat the media as an equal partner in the public sphere. They are at liberty to introduce their own issue preferences for discussion, irrespective of the fact that all this is happening on the Facebook page of a media house. In a discussion on how people determine what issues are more relevant, Joanne Miller (2007: 692- 693), observes that even when the media makes some issues more accessible than others, this does not mean that people will take these issues to be of relevance. Miller argues that people choose relevance of issues as guided by a number of factors, such as the negative emotions of fear and anxiety that a particular news story may arouse. That if a story arouses any of these emotions, people tend to pay more attention to it and engage more with its contents. This is the case as seen in the scenario above, in which Facebook followers have instead chosen to ask about a different story from what is presented in the media. The story of choice is related to

missing voting material at the peak of elections. This story, has arguably aroused the anxiety that Miller (2007) talks about, and is therefore deemed more relevant by the Facebook followers. Users of Facebook table for discussion the issues they feel are more pertinent at a given time. They use social media as a way of engaging in the electoral process (Makinen and Kuira 2008: 329), on issues they deem more pertinent. This therefore presents Facebook as a liberated space where various issues are presented by followers and conclusively discussed.

The irony is that whereas NTV posted stories as a show of authority and power over the online political discourse, this authority is seen to be neutralised when followers on Facebook discuss both the story contents and other issues of preference. It is on this premise that this study argues that the agenda-setting role of traditional television is in conflict with the discursive nature of the Facebook public sphere. Facebook arguably has the power to disrupt the unilateral agenda-setting role of traditional media. And in essence, Facebook also has the power to disrupt the struggles for hegemony by taking it from the agents or organisations that have traditionally been known to hold such power, and redistributing it amongst all players online.

It can therefore be concluded that ordinary citizens who converge in the Facebook public sphere, are safeguarding its discursive nature by exercising control over both the media agenda setting role and the assumed power of the media over national discourse. Whereas Fortunato and Martin (2016: 129- 130), consider Facebook as a nexus of content from media houses, agendas of different individuals and organisations, new communication platforms, audiences seeking information and the laws governing election campaign policy, this thesis argues that it is more than just a nexus. It is a struggle for control over this communicative space, by the different actors who converge online.

Facebook as an advertising platform

Followers on social media are known to engage with posts that are informative, entertaining and those that contain remuneration (Gaber, 2014: 57). A Facebook page of a media house would in this case fall under an informative social media platform and therefore a constant source of engagement. This study found out that beneath NTV's strategy to instantly share news content on

Facebook was an embedded intention to draw numbers to be ‘sold’ to potential advertisers. Advertisers are attracted to accurately targeted audiences online. This is especially so since traditional news organisations no longer have the privileged position of delivering the world to their audiences (Freedman, 2010: 35). The editors interviewed at NTV confirm that the need to attract advertisers was one of the intentions in populating content on Facebook, and that it was a worthwhile effort.

Whenever we are marketing the stations to advertisers, we tell them these are the number of people that you can get on Facebook, especially when we are selling live broadcasts. We tell them look, this is the talk-ability you are able to generate from all this (Respondent A, 14 April 2018).

Whereas the need to attract advertisers is true for traditional media’s Facebook engagements, it is also true that netizens expect adverts to reach them in this sphere. Whereas traditional mass media are known for allowing brand managers to use the platforms in reaching out to prospective customers (Killian and McManus, 2015: 540), the onset of social media reverses this role. Instead, consumers expect the brand to interact with them in a medium where they control the conversation. In addition, Roberts (2010) notes that consumers online enjoy the advantage of interaction amongst themselves and with the business. Facebook presents with various features/applications such as newsfeeds, photos and videos which allow for creativity in advertising. Therefore, advertising on social media now forms part of the different strategies employed by companies in their integrated marketing communication efforts (Gaber, 2014: 53). Furthermore, the growing numbers on Facebook imply that one can reach the desired consumers without any financial risk (Roberts 2010: 25- 26). The lessened financial risk is indeed true for NTV, where, as noted by one of the editors, the station stands more to gain from Facebook:

There are a lot of advantages around the number of followers you have on social media. The digital platform is now a revenue cash cow for NTV. We now have contracts with different companies that share content for us to post on our social media platforms. The reason they are coming to us is because of the numbers. We reach more people than they would reach on their platforms. We are looking at about 4% of our revenue coming from

our digital platforms. It is still very small, but it is the fastest growing. If there is any platform making money for us without necessarily spending, it is the digital one. Secondly, it is a marketing tool for NTV when we are pushing content such as TV promos and personality graphics. If we are sharing content about things that will be soon coming on air, events that we are partnering on, it becomes another marketing tool (Respondent B, 17 April 2018).

Gaber (2014) discusses two forms of advertising on Facebook. In one of these forms, advertisers pay for their adverts to appear on home pages of Facebook users/companies. The other type of advertising involves companies setting up pages and getting followers to like the page. Such followers will then be able to see any posts, including adverts, on the page. This study concerns itself with the latter form, as followers of the NTV Facebook page get exposed to the adverts thereon while engaging with the posted news content. One of the advantages of advertising on Facebook is the ability to customise an advert and successfully target a specific audience by gender, location, demography or any other considerations (Gaber, 2014). To Roberts (2010:26), the fact that networking and communication are already happening on Facebook presents this platform as an effective marketing tool. Aware of the potential of Facebook as an advertising platform, NTV has strategically positioned to reap from the growing numbers of followers. It can therefore be concluded that NTV's online agenda setting explained above, is complementary to the intention to grow the number of online followers. This makes it necessary for the television station to keep its Facebook platform constantly updated. Faced with the fact that television audiences are on a decline and with them the advertising revenues, expansion into online platforms is in this case seen as a way to redeem both the advertising revenues and dwindling audiences (Dwyer, 2010: 3).

Conclusion

This section has shown that the Facebook platform is used by television as an extension of the newsroom. On the platform, traditional media carries its known roles of agenda setting and dissemination of information to a waiting mass audience, who have been known to possess little access to facts/events. Whereas the interactive nature of Facebook changes this notion to give

netizens substantial power over discourse, feedback from traditional media is absent. The absence of engagement on the side of NTV is understood as a demonstration of power to dictate discourse by presenting topics and not engaging. NTV maintains a skeletal staff in charge of populating the platform, but not to engage and answer the numerous inquiries from netizens. By implication, mass media carries its assumed superiority over national discourse, which is in conflict with the collegiality of Facebook. The result of such an attempt is a conflict of hegemony over topics for discussion, as the media's agenda conflicts with that of Facebook followers. Topics for debate are brought by Facebook followers from their own experiences of events in their surroundings. The ensuing Facebook discussions are similar to Habermas' public sphere of the feudal ages, when citizens met in coffee houses and discussed both what was published in the newspapers and what was happening in society. This is therefore further confirmation that Facebook is indeed a public sphere (Castells, 2008; Lim, 2009) that traditional media has attempted to transform into a one-way platform for setting the agenda on political discourse.

In addition, this section has shown that Facebook is used as a platform to grow audiences to be sold to advertisers. In this space, there is seldom any response from television towards concerns from followers but rather the continuous pushing of news content. This content then becomes part of the topics for debate online, as more and more followers join the page. Advertisers are attracted to active pages with substantial numbers of followers.

Chapter 6 Citizens on Facebook: Uganda's public sphere

Introduction

This study set out to examine the political discourse on Facebook as a public sphere in Uganda, basing on a platform managed by one of the privately owned television stations in the country. On Facebook, ordinary citizens or netizens are availed with the opportunity to voice their thoughts and ideas. As such, the citizens find voice and dare challenge government positions on various current affairs issues. They use the power of discourse to exert themselves and resist attempts by both the media and the state to control this discourse. This juxtaposes with traditional media's involvement on Facebook, which seems to be driven more by a fear of extinction (Rodny-Gumede, 2017) than by a desire to be a conduit for information exchange to enable meaningful political participation (McNair, 2006:136).

A discursive analytic approach to understanding political discourse will be applied. It will be concerned with how power is enacted, articulated and resisted and what structures are put in place by those in power to dictate what should or should not be said. It would be repetitive and unnecessarily wordy to present in this chapter and the subsequent one the entire list of eight stories and 240 comments identified for analysis in this study. Consequently, only a selected few that best represent the respective arguments will be discussed. A full list of the stories and comments is available as Appendix C. The Facebook posts chosen for analysis are presented in their unedited form to preserve originality. However, the names of the respective people who posted these comments on Facebook have been omitted for confidentiality.

The previous chapter has demonstrated how the television station used Facebook, largely to extend its mass media logic. This chapter presents the findings based on the second research objective which seeks 'To examine the nature of engagement on Facebook as a public sphere.'

The engagement by citizens or followers is presented in two categories. One of these categories shows how the followers directly engage with the posted content. The manner in which these netizens engage with the media content is presented to show how, by extension, they engage or reach out to NTV. It is this category that helped establish the absence of responses from NTV.

The engagement with media content was in some incidents a request for clarification from NTV, or simply an appreciation note. Similarly, through this category, the followers reach out to institutions of the state (in reaction to what the state has said through the media). As earlier seen, it is partly through the media that the power of other institutions in society is amplified. This section argues that the followers engage with the media content rationally. This rationality is demonstrated when these followers either resist or accept what is presented. The resistance or acceptance is understood to be a demonstration of what Dijk (2001) calls actions of the less powerful, against control of public discourse by the powerful groups.

The second category relates to how followers engage with one another in reaction to posted news content. These followers are presented to be ‘in dialogue’ with one another as they seek to make meaning of both the media content and the intervention of the state. In this dialogue, the study shows that these followers are both in agreement and disagreement with one another as they discuss or debate the media content. Below is a tabulated format of these findings, followed by their detailed explanation and presentation of relevant evidence:

Table 6: Reflection of engagement on the NTV Facebook page during Uganda’s 2016 Presidential Elections

Nature of engagement on the NTV Facebook page	Dimensions of engagement	Number of comments
Rational debate of media content	Resistance of news content	110
	Acceptance of news content	04
Facebook followers in dialogue	Followers in disagreement	32
	Followers in agreement	94
Total		240

In brief, the nature of engagement on Facebook is one of i) rational debate of media content and ii) followers in dialogue. The table above is a breakdown of how these dimensions of engagement are spread across the data analysed. Whereas the table presents a counting of these posts under the ‘number of comments,’ this counting is used only to give an indication of the spread of these

dimensions across the data. The subsequent discussion follows a qualitative interpretation and analysis. Uganda's Facebook followers as depicted on the NTV page have proven to be quite outspoken as per this study, whose number of comments under the dimension of 'Resistance of news content,' outweigh all the other dimensions. These dimensions are expounded on below.

Rational debate of media content

The ability to hold rational debate is one of the tenets of the public sphere. It is at the core of any public sphere's formation as a space for well-reasoned arguments. In Habermas' public sphere, the nobles and middle class are said to have met on equal footing in the coffee house debates, to advance arguments of good reason (Habermas, 1989; Holub, 1991). Such debates became a basis for change of controversial and widely contested government policies. As such, the quality and rationality of debate in the public sphere was respected by those who convened in it. Traditional media reported the discussions that unfolded in the public sphere, and so did the content of such media become a basis to spark off discussions in this sphere.

In the current scenario of traditional media joining the public sphere of Facebook, a continuation of this role is seen. Content from traditional media is seen to feed the online public sphere and becomes a basis for rational debate. This rational debate is demonstrated through both the reasoned resistance and acceptance of news content as explained below.

Resistance of news content

This is the most prevalent dimension of engagement, standing at 110 comments of the 240 studied as reflected in Table 6 above. This dimension of engagement manifests when followers of the page contest the facts reported in a given story. Specifically, this dimension presents through followers': contestation of media framing of issues, demand for better governance and rejection of interference in the public sphere and sharing experiences of better practice from elsewhere. Each of these categories is explained further below.

Contestation of media framing of issues

The first category under the dimension of resistance is demonstrated through contestation of media framing of issues. A story posted on 3 January 2016 will serve as an example to explain this category. The story reads, 'Police deploy to block Besigye's school visits. Besigye tricked police who were trailing him and sneaked to a dam where animals share water with locals.'

This is the narrative presented by the television station on Facebook, to explain that one of the presidential candidates- Besigye managed to sneak to a dam even though he was under the watchful eye of police. But in response to this narrative, one of the followers challenges the choice of language by NTV in describing the action of the presidential candidate as 'sneaking'. The follower posts, "*Ntv also, don't say Dr. BESIGYE sneaked, the Dr. went majestically to the pond in the name of a dam.*" The contrast in the use of the word 'majestically' over the word 'sneaked' is a demonstration of the power that citizens have in challenging media narratives online. Majestically arguably denotes an act done in confidence and honour, as opposed to 'sneaking,' which comes off as a dubious and timid act. In addition, the Facebook platform has in this case allowed the person posting to give his/her account of events.

As observed by Allan (1998: 105), television news accounts often present certain preferred definitions of reality and expect audiences to perceive these as natural. Such definitions, as extended by the media, have profound implications for the cultural reproduction of power relations across society. News workers have been known to cause a strong correlation between the inflection of a news topic in a specific account and the audience members' reading of this topic (Allan 1998: 117). Media determines what is newsworthy and what aspects of an occurrence to make salient, especially in the production of news and other current affairs (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The media is often guided by certain values such as objectivity, truthfulness and the need for balance in news reporting. The media's role of availing information has often meant that citizens have over time debated issues as per the dimensions, confines or perspectives presented by the media.

But the online public sphere changes this notion by extending the power to present issues of national discourse from the sole custody of the media to a shared responsibility by ordinary people as well. This power has meant that netizens can expand the confines of debate in the online speech community, introduce new topics for discussion and resist or challenge the content presented by traditional media. It can be argued therefore that in this sphere, ordinary citizens or followers of Facebook take charge of the conversation even when traditional media attempts to present or frame issues as guided by standards designed to promote news content. Some of these standards are specific to certain in-house rules of different media houses. A known advantage of social media is its ability to allow users to co-produce content (Zuckerberg, 2010). In this case, the direct responses in availing additional information on given news content are a demonstration of the binary production of information. In the Facebook public sphere, followers co-produce news content by resisting that which is carefully or journalistically put forth by traditional media.

Demand for better governance

On the Facebook platform, netizens use the NTV page to air out their grievances to the state. This way, NTV is seen to play the role of availing voice to the voiceless, in as much measure as it amplifies the power of powerful institutions in society (Dijk 2008). On the NTV platform, netizens reach out to the state demanding for better governance. For example, and still in relation to the above story, some followers take the opportunity to remind government of its obligations, which have been neglected over time. Four followers post that:

Why can't sevo [Museveni] also visit these schools.... Of course he would be ashamed of himself, tax payers drinking water with animals mbu steady progress.

It's really unfair to the people of Nankasongola to share that dirty water with animals. Billions of shillings have been lost through corruption which could help them get clean water.

If they have done a lot in 30 years of their rule as NRM, why don't they shame Dr. Kiiza for always telling lies to Ugandans? Why deploying heavy Police force? It means they

have done nothing in 30 years and indeed they have rotten health centres and schools. Shame on Museveni.

But proper politics is about issues including provision of services for the electorate. The more reason the contestants are free to visit these facilities like schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers etc to view how satisfactorily they have been managed in order to design a work plan in case any of them win. It's good politics to allow freedom to all candidates in these places. Even for the incumbent what we know many officials along the line of service provision have just been fleecing govt money from the ministries down to the district while giving the executive false reports about what they ve done on ground. Therefore exposing the rot will help the incumbent to strengthen the management team to ensure good service provision. That is my view as a management analyst.

The dissatisfaction levelled at government and the police force in the above story is similar to that levelled at the country's Electoral Commission in a story posted on 5 January 2016. This story reads in part, 'EC [Electoral Commission] says the recent ban on visits to hospitals and places of worship for presidential candidates was not based on any law but on concern for privacy of patients and worshippers.' The selected four followers of the page come out to fault the EC and blame them for being partial.

EC supports M7. Have the patients & the worshipers complained that Besigye should not go to them? EC must watch out.

The EC is neither religious nor health affiliated. So Kiggundu stop confusions but pray to God to remove the incompetence in you. For you are partisan according to your statement. [Eng. Badru Kiggundu was the then chairperson of the electoral commission].

The few hospitals and schools Col. Dr. Kizza Besigye has visited people have welcomed him with great Joy and he has be prayed for in the churches so can the EC give examples of who complained?

Thank you EC for being concerned about our privacy but why don't you worry about the privacy and safety of our votes and let the Medical teams and the Religious teams worry about patients and Sick people.

The deeper implication of the above resistance of news content is that additional voices, which traditional media has been unable to reach in the past, are now present in the online public sphere. In this sphere, such voices are at liberty to speak their mind and challenge the manner in which they are governed. Similar to the public sphere that Habermas talks about, these voices debate from an equal stand point. The constrained financial and human resource environment, coupled with limited news space, are some of the known explanations for traditional media's inability to reach as many voices as possible over an issue. But in the online sphere, these voices are present to challenge the state on issues of governance.

In addition, resistance to power by dominated groups is one of the ways that other less powerful categories of people in society are known to exert themselves and find voice. Dijk (2008: 30- 31) argues that the dominated categories of people in society, or those who are less privileged, are not usually completely powerless. That depending on certain socio-economic, historical or cultural conditions, these groups of people can be in position to display various forms of resistance. Dijk refers to these forms of resistance as the enactment of counter-power. Such counter-power can potentially turn the initially powerful categories of people or the rulers into a vulnerable lot, for example as is seen in political revolutions. He argues further that a discussion on power therefore ought to be cognisant of the various forms of counter power or resistance that can be brought forth by dominated groups. For Simons (1995: 83), such resistance or demonstration of counter-power emanates from the inability to properly coordinate the various factions of power. The emphasis here by both Dijk (2008) and Simons (1995) is that people have power to resist domination and they will use this power when needed. It is from this premise that the study analyses the forms of counter power, herein reflected in the resistance of news content posted on Facebook.

Indeed for the case of Uganda's Facebook public sphere, the followers are aware that they have a certain amount of counter-power and they take the opportunity to remind whoever cares to listen

that they can wield such power. This is demonstrated for example in the two quotes below, which were part of the aforementioned story in which police deployed to block Besigye's school visits:

Animals have single suit and nothing is hidden of them. NRM government is like those animals with single suit. Now the keys are in the hands of Ugandans to open the house of freedom am enjoying the last kicks of a dying horse... bye bye Museveni.

No retreat no surrender #DR KB our presdo come feb the choice of People In Arua & west Nile.

Rejection of interference in the public sphere

This category under the dimension of resistance of news content is best explained by the events that took place on the elections days of 18 and 19 February 2016, when social media was shut down in Uganda. The shutdown was effected by telecommunications companies, following a directive from UCC. The story on NTV's Facebook page that communicated this shutdown partially read, 'ED UCC [Executive Director Uganda Communications commission], Godfrey Mutabazi says Mobile Money and social media were shut down because there was information that people were using these to bribe voters.'

Directives for shutdowns are usually given with a threat of sanctions for non-compliance. For the case of Uganda, the directive was to be effected by telecommunication companies. Although the means of access to the Internet are usually in the hands of private firms, including the hardware, software, and physical infrastructure, governments have been known to exert control of access through regulation- which involves the capacity to shut down the Internet (Eriksson 2009: 208). The action was in addition a demonstration of how powerful groups control discourse by limiting or closing access to communicative spaces and platforms (Dijk 2008: 29, 67). The government of Uganda, in a demonstration of power, ordered the Internet shut down. It is this demonstration of power that netizens, unlike the telecommunication companies, resisted. These netizens or Facebook followers were aware that the directive was interference into their public sphere of free debate and that it carried a consequence for their freedom of expression.

Whereas the shutdown was meant to curtail communication amongst citizens, it did not fully achieve this. As a way of regaining control of the Facebook public sphere, followers took to Facebook to express their rejection of government's interference in the Facebook public sphere, as seen in the four comments below that were posted on the NTV page:

Please tell them they are under qualified for the job because as you can see we managed to access them sites!

These guys should upgrade their thinking. UCC never created internet so it can never limit or block its accessibility.

They should have shut down even sms services, because I received a msge from the President M7 campaign team at 8.00 am advising me to vote Mr. M7.

They want to ban us from access to information so that they can easily manipulate the outcome of the results. Is there any who has bribed more than them? The möney they have been sending 2 villages? Access 2 information is a fundamental human right according 2 international standards.

The online public sphere, similar to that of the feudal Middle Ages, allows ordinary citizens to exercise control or power over the state (Dahlgren and Sparks 1991: 29). The above rejection of government interference in the public sphere is a further demonstration of what Dijk (2008: 30) describes as various forms of resistance that the less powerful groups have at their disposal. On Facebook, these groups are seen to resist state control by use of discourse and scorn against state actions. Such power in the hands of citizens is best demonstrated through social groups or collective actions as opposed to individual actions. Dijk (2008: 29) observes that social power is a function of the relationship between groups or classes of people who come together with a focus on their belonging as social members. With this collective power, Dijk (2008) further explains that discourse is then presented as a form of social interaction.

Sharing experiences of better practice from elsewhere

The online public sphere further makes it possible for citizens to crosscheck information available elsewhere and share it instantly with the other participants in demanding better from the state. As a further demonstration of this power in the hands of citizens, they are able to relate to experiences elsewhere in demanding for better accountability. At the time of the Internet shutdown for example, updates from the country's EC and the UCC were not in sync over who directed the shutdown. This uncoordinated communication is interrogated by the Facebook followers as seen below:

It's so suprising! I can't tell who is fulling ugandans! Electoral commission have just said that they are not responsible for interference in social media access that theirs is to arrange elections and yet ucc is just posting that they are waiting for communication from electoral commission on either to switch on social media networks. WHO IS FOOLING WHO?

Whereas the government of Uganda defended the shut down in relation to security concerns, citizens were able to question why the same is not applicable in other countries. For example, one follower inquired:

How comes other countries can vote without blocking the social media and yet it's peaceful? If it's a peaceful free and fair elections as you claim and yet everyone knows that they can only cast one vote why do you bring out all militants and police fully armed? WE NEED CHANGE FOR UGANDA TO DEVELOP.

To add to this frustration, another follower reacts with the post that:

Now UCC stop fooling around its Sevo [Museveni] that ordered you to shut down now you are saying it was the Electoral Commission. I wonder even What more are you hiding coz the whole world Knows Sevo rigged the votes.

As noted by Bentivegna (2002: 53), while engaging online, members use personal experience in interpreting the topics debated. Bentivegna adds that the knowledge used is derived from common experience as a basis for online political discourse. Some of the followers on the page drew on their professional experience to make succinct arguments, for example as earlier seen in the argument by a follower who identifies themselves as a management analyst. Others drew on analogies in the bible and stories in the media to support their argument on Facebook. A case in point is the story posted on 19 February 2016, titled 'Besigye and Mugisha Muntu have been arrested in Najjanakumbi.' In response to this story, a follower on the page makes reference to the bible in urging Ugandans towards resistance. The post reads,

Even in the Bible when Jesus entered into the Temple and found Israelites have changed it [into] a market, he did not prayed for them he used violence to bring normance. So Ugandans if u want democracy be ready to shed blood.

From the position of this thesis that Facebook is a platform for contestation of power by the media, the state and netizens, the above section has demonstrated how netizens handle this situation. Netizens arguably successfully exercise the power at their disposal in challenging the power of the state and the media over discourse. It is on Facebook that they successfully resist control of the political discourse by presenting alternative views and rejecting the media narrative and the actions of the state. This success reaches its epitome with the ability to circumvent the Internet shutdown. Whereas the state and the media are known to be more powerful than the ordinary citizens, Facebook arguably changes this power balance or the lack thereof in favour of the last category (citizens). One of the journalists at NTV who was actively involved in covering the 2016 elections recalls that Facebook was indeed a point of contestation during the elections:

I must say that Facebook was used like a weapon during the 2016 elections. A weapon which government tried even to dismantle but they failed and going forward I think government should just appreciate Facebook. May be they learnt a lesson or two and being the social media leaders in Uganda, I believe we [NTV] gave people the platform to raise their issues about this election. I think when UCC or government saw that people

were becoming tough on social media that is when they closed it down. But people continued after finding the short cut (Respondent K, 12 April 2018).

The above comments further demonstrate how in the public sphere of Facebook, pressure of public opinion builds up against the state (Dahlgren and Sparks, 1991: 29) as seen in the collective voice of people. The engagement shows how people converge in the online public sphere as citizens, not motivated by commercial interests (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2009: 196), to challenge the status quo. These citizens debate issues of common concern. In addition, these members are able to hold meaningful conversation as strangers (Calhoun, 2003:1), who respect each other's opinion. So rational is the debate on Facebook that even the well-known state-surveillance of this platform (Chibita and Ugangu, 2017: 252) does not seem to stop netizens from speaking out and calling government officials to task. This is contrary to the observation by Miller *et. al* (2016) that the fear of state surveillance explains why not all citizens on Facebook are free to hold free debate. For Miller *et. al* (2016), this fear eventually translates into silence on Facebook and consequently relegates the platform to one for maintaining good relations amongst the followers. But this thesis has demonstrated to the contrary.

The engagement further demonstrates how Facebook is used for the free expression of views in Uganda. Citizens dare challenge government, former government officials and the media. It can be concluded therefore that Facebook as a public sphere in Uganda has given citizens a platform to express their views and in big numbers as per the issue at hand. This resonates with the observation by Javuru (2013: 371), that social media has allowed people across the divide in Uganda to express opinion on political, economic and social issues. Such possible expression of views has had the consequence of making more and more citizens realise that they too can join the debate on civic issues, and that they can now hold their leaders accountable (Gumede, 2016: 414).

The limited space in traditional media has meant that Ugandans will continuously turn to social media for a larger and debatably unrestricted communicative space for debate and for the exercise of power. In this space, followers of the platform problematise issues that were initially taboo, for example calling the incumbent to task as seen in some of the comments above. This is

similar to the problematisation of areas that had not been questioned in the time of Habermas' writing (Habermas, 1989). Facebook is indeed a public sphere in Uganda.

But it can be argued that a discussion would not qualify to be rational if it brings forth only one set of opinions as seen above under the dimension of resistance. In the Facebook public sphere however, there is accommodation of alternative views. These views were reflected on the NTV Facebook page as well. The next section presents and discusses these views under the dimension of 'acceptance of news content.'

Acceptance of news content

Acceptance of news content is interpreted to imply that the followers do not contest the news content but rather take it as is. Incidences of 'acceptance' were less spread across the content in comparison to resistance of the same as seen in Table 6. To be specific, only two out of the eight stories chosen for analysis had incidences of 'acceptance of news content.' Even across these two stories, the comments generated were only four, the lowest number across the analysis.

One of the stories with this dimension of engagement was posted on 5 January 2016. It is titled 'EC says the recent ban on visits to hospitals and places of worship for presidential candidates was not based on any law but on concern for privacy of patients and worshippers.' In this story, the country's Electoral Commission gives a directive barring presidential candidates from visiting hospitals and centres of worship while on the campaign trail. In support of this decision, three followers post the following comments:

This time EC is right here. Hospitals are not for campaigns. You trumatise those patients more by exposing them on TVs and social media. I think politicians would still gain popularity by donating to the hospitals other than visiting just to gain cheap popularity.

It is not like they refused the politicians to visit the facilities, it is the timing that is hypocritical. For a man like Amama who is partially responsible for the current state of the hospitals to visit them for vote purposes is pure mockery. As for Besigye, he should have visited the hospitals in normal times not campaigning period.

Kale Kaihura [Gen. Kayihura was the Inspector General of Police] & kiggundu [Eng. Kiggundu was the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission] r protecting their jobs by accepting m7 order, anyway they know that no law aveils on candidates visit to hospitals or schools, so they see that when they part away 4rm m7 vos orders there fired, nd u pple well know employment is a problem, so lets blem m7 nd his supportes thats all.

The other story in which this dimension manifests is the one in which police deployed to block Besigye's school visits and Besigye ended up 'sneaking' to a dam where animals share water with locals. The only comment under the dimension of 'acceptance of news content comes off as sarcastic. It reads, "*The swaga of tha curent regime..Ugandans drinkin with animals..Thnx NTV 4 ur openness.*"

The above comments demonstrate conformity with the news content as opposed to followers simply posting in favour of their preferred presidential candidates. Although the incidences of this conformity or 'acceptance' were fewer than those of resistance, they demonstrate that the rationality in debate on Facebook. The researcher therefore departs from earlier observations by Javuru (2013: 372) that the online discussions in Uganda are not based on rationality but that one who shouts loudest and puts down other discussants wins. The reviewed posts on the NTV page show that discussants that both conform to, and resist, content presented in the public sphere are active on Facebook to conduct rational debate. The higher number of those who debate under the dimension of resistance of news content is arguably not a demonstration that those who "shout loudest and puts down other discussants win." No. It is rather an aggressive demonstration that Facebook followers use the platform as a true public sphere in which they demand for accountability across a variety of issues in the country. These followers are arguably cognisant of the fact that such spaces for free debate are limited in Uganda and they therefore make maximum use of one of the few available ones- Facebook. As earlier explained, one of such spaces that is no longer available are the once famous radio talk shows (see chapter one about these shows, commonly known as 'ebimeeza').

In their rational discussion of the country's political discourse, these followers put government officials to task, share experiences of better practice from elsewhere and resist interference in the

Facebook public sphere, as already discussed. It is therefore unlikely that netizens would take to Facebook to highly praise government in a period such as the elections, when the state and its institutions are seen oppress members of the opposition and citizens - to the point of shutting down social media. These findings on rational debate on Facebook are further contrary to Javuru's (2013) assertion that name-calling takes precedent on Facebook and that the voice of journalists, academics, university students and the Diaspora community carries more weight and authority during discussions. As per this study, the Facebook followers post their comments minus identifying themselves or making their titles known. They therefore debate issues irrespective of the titles or backgrounds they each hold. It is only in one incident that a follower identifies themselves as a management analyst, and this is done to validate the specific information being given, which picks from this follower's professional experience. This post reads in part:

...Its good politics to allow freedom to all candidates in these places. Even for the incumbent what we know many officials along the line of service provision have just been fleecing govt money from the ministries down to the district while giving the executive false reports about what they've done on ground. Therefore exposing the rot will help the incumbent to strengthen the management team to ensure good service provision. That is my view as a management analyst.

This section has demonstrated and explained the first interpretation on the nature of engagement on Facebook titled: Rational debate on Facebook. The section has demonstrated that this rationality is diverse. The diversity allows followers to both resist and accept the content presented in news. These followers take charge of the conversation. In the public sphere of Facebook, the followers aggressively put government officials to task as they continuously contest oppressive government positions depicted in the news, and equally resist the media presentation of some of the issues. The next section proceeds to discuss the second nature of engagement on Facebook. This engagement focuses on the relationship amongst the followers.

Facebook followers in dialogue

In discussing how political discourse in the media operates, Fairclough (1998: 148-149) explains the presence of confluences and alliances amongst the different agents such as the ordinary people, politicians and other groups. He describes such relations as depictive of antagonists or protagonists in the struggle for hegemony in the media. He argues further that an analysis of political discourse in the media therefore ought to be cognizant of the confluences and alliances between these agents and orders of discourse. It is with this hindsight that this study analyses the relationship amongst Facebook followers as they discuss and shape discourse on Facebook.

This relationship is herein presented under two dimensions: ‘followers in agreement’ and ‘followers in disagreement.’ These dimensions are similar to what Fairclough terms as confluences and alliances between agents, which presents them either as antagonists or protagonists. These two extremes of dialogue are analysed in relation to actions of both the media and the state. Facebook is in this case the run-to space for followers to hold conversation and directly speak to one another about their interpretations of the actions of these institutions.

Followers in agreement

Incidences of Facebook followers in agreement with one another over views relating to the news content were quite prevalent in the data too as shown in Table 6, standing at 94 comments of the 240. Such incidences fell second place to incidences of ‘resistance of news content.’ Below are the different strata through which this ‘agreement’ manifested:

Disaffection against the state

The first category under this dimension of dialogue is demonstrated through consensus as Facebook followers support one another in raising a strong public opinion against the state. The story that reported incumbent Museveni’s win will be used as an example to demonstrate how these followers supported each other.

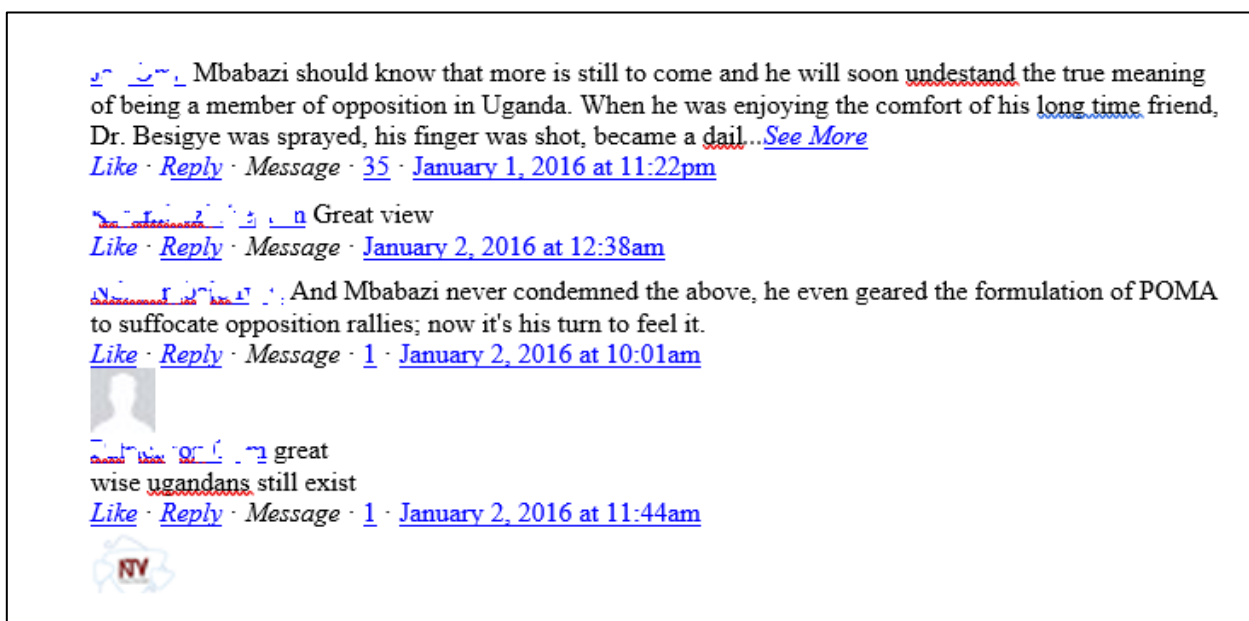
This story was posted on 20 February 2018 and is titled, ‘Kiggundu: The commission declares candidate Yoweri Kaguta Museveni as the elected President of Uganda this 20/Feb/2016.’ In

response to this story, one of the followers, dissatisfied with the outcome, reaches out to other followers by posting that,

...every ugandans believes with me that col. Dr. kizza Besigye is the people's elected president Naye kigundu will be judged type AMEN.

This call for an 'Amen' is embraced by the majority of followers on the page. To be specific, 20 followers out of the 30 comments analysed per story (refer to chapter four on how this selection of number of comments was made) positively responded to this call. Some of these followers typed the required 'Amen' while others added more text to it, for instance as seen in the response: "aamen may there dayz b shortned" and in another response "Amen, may kigundu b judged."

Figure 6: A screenshot of the engagement by NTV's Facebook followers(with identities masked)



Taking the above image of the Facebook page in which NTV reported that former premier Mbabazi had expressed concern over being shadowed by unknown men as another example, one of the followers posts:

Mbabazi should know that more is still to come and he will soon understand the true meaning of being a member of opposition in Uganda. When he was enjoying the comfort of his longtime friend, Dr. Besigye was sprayed, his finger was shot.

In agreement with this post, another follower posts:

And Mbabazi never condemned the above, he even geared the formulation of POMA to suffocate opposition rallies; now it's his turn to feel it.

POMA is an acronym for the Public Order Management Act, which sought to restrict the activities of political parties by subjecting them to police approval. The Act was approved when Hon. Amama Mbabazi was prime minister. Clearly the citizens, still fresh from the events surrounding this Act, take to Facebook to remind Hon. Mbabazi of his past deeds.

In yet another story posted on 19 February titled 'Besigye and Mugisha Muntu have been arrested in Najjanakumbi', the followers point to the building frustration over the country's electoral body.

As long as Kiggundu is chairman EC, and Museveni stands, no other person will win even if the election is organised in Heaven and Jesus, Angel michael and Gabriel stand against Museveni, reads one post.

In support of this, other followers write:

so true. And another adds, *Praying for Uganda.*

The above posts demonstrate how Uganda's Facebook public sphere reincarnates what Habermas (1989) describes as a breeding ground for dissent against the state. Discussions in the public sphere have traditionally been considered as anti-government. In this environment, the followers continuously form a strong public opinion against the state, its institutions and even former government officials are not spared this wrath. These followers therefore form a solid block of antagonists against the state and protagonists in relation to the followers themselves. In the case

of Britain for example, such dissent was in relation to contestation of press laws (Lee, 1976: 22) and the industrial revolution (Habermas, 1989: 57-59), as dissatisfied citizens appealed to the critical public. The result was a strong formation of public opinion against the state. Participants in this public sphere would therefore transform into what Caldwell (2017: 114-115) refers to as political actors. Uganda's Facebook public sphere is not any different as a breeding ground for dissent or disaffection against the state.

Concern over government interference in the public sphere

At the height of the Internet shut down, not only were Facebook followers in agreement at scolding government for the unsuccessful attempt at the blockade, they also used the platform to help one another and circulate information on how to bypass the blockade. As seen in the following back-to-back communication, the followers share advice on how to overcome the shut-down.

We are accessing everything to the maximum, Orbot, tunnel bear and www.proxysite.com are all helping us to access social media.#basembye, reads one post.

Can someone help how to do it? inquires a follower who is helped immediately with the response that *download secure vpn now*.

As demonstrated in the above posts, citizens of Uganda are quick to react in support of each other's posts on Facebook, especially where such posts speak out against inappropriate actions by government. In this sphere, the citizens have built trust amongst themselves with a consequence of increasing their engagement in political activities (Velenzuela, 2013). Indeed, a lot more people find voice through the Internet, particularly Facebook, as opposed to the traditional media of television for instance (Rasmussen, 2007: 9).

This study further seeks to draw a correlation between the dimension of engagement in which followers were in 'agreement' with each other and the dimension in which these followers 'resisted' the news content. Here is how: when the news content did not favour an opposition presidential candidate, the followers supported or agreed with anyone who spoke out against this

content. This analysis explains why the two dimensions of engagement with the highest prevalence are: ‘resistance of news content’ and ‘followers in agreement.’ Both these dimensions of engagement were spread across all the eight stories selected for analysis. This spread is interpreted by the researcher to imply that since all the selected stories showed opposition presidential candidates in oppressive situations ahead of the polls, the followers of the Facebook page took to the platform to speak out against this oppression.

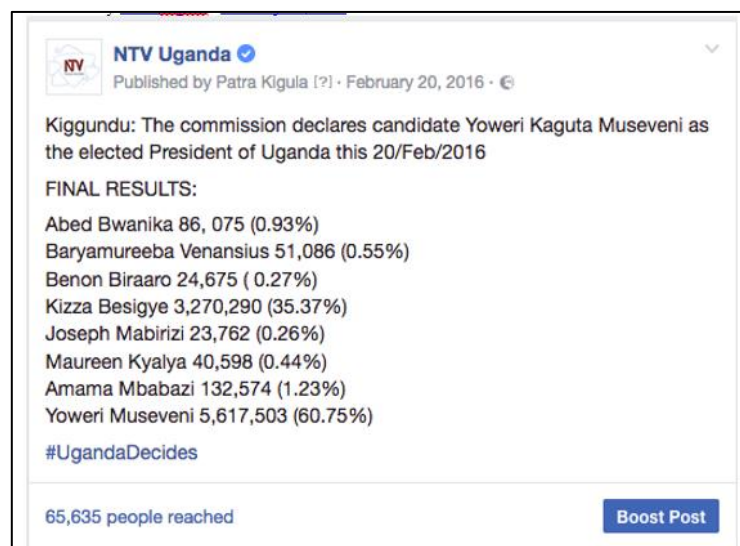
Consequently, they supported anyone who dared speak out against this oppression. The public sphere has traditionally been known to be a place for free expression of views, some of which may be against the state. It can be concluded therefore, that Uganda’s Facebook public sphere is the space where such free expression of views takes place. The analysis of the impact of Facebook best makes sense when applied in context of a given society (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002: 51). If the volume of civic matters on Facebook is anything to go by (Gumede, 2016), coupled with the number of followers who support each other on these matters, then it can be concluded that Facebook is capable of bringing higher levels of democracy to Uganda. This is especially true since, as noted by Mugerwa and Malaba (2018), citizens of Uganda are increasingly critical of the state on Facebook.

Followers in disagreement

Diversity in opinion

From the domineering agreement between followers on Facebook (94 comments), it is less surprising that the platform demonstrates few cases of followers in disagreement (32 comments) over each other’s posts. In some of the stories where followers seem to disagree with one another, the comments come off as light.

Figure 7: NTV's Facebook page relays the 2016 Presidential Election results



In the story that reported incumbent Museveni's win on 20 February 2016, when one of the followers on the page posts that: *"every ugandans believes with me that col.Dr. kizza Besigye is the people's elected president Naye kigundu will be judged type AMEN,"* not everyone typed the required Amen.

In disagreement to this call, one of the followers writes: *"waaaaaaa which people? May be minority."*

Another one hastily takes on this response and writes: *"... you have a big problem the people's president is Col Dr kizza Besigye that's all rigging imagine the support we had."*

The story about the former prime minister, Hon. Patrick Amama Mbabazi, will be used as another example. This is the story in which he expressed concern that unknown men are shadowing him and could be harbouring a sinister plot to harm him. The three back-to-back conversations below from the Facebook followers demonstrates how they were in disagreement with one another over this story:

We are keeping a very close eye on Yoweri Museveni. God help him if any harm comes to Amama Mbabazi. For so long M7 has got away with murder, this time it will be him poking the behind of a leopard as he infamously said.

How about Amama Mbabazi, you mean for him he hasn't gone away with some murders or you think the public forgot about the boyfriend to the daughter who was killed in cold blood at the kololo residence. Again why should you try to cut the hand that fed you, after stealing from the government now you want to protect whatever you stole..SHAME

What have you been drinking? Boyfriend to the daughter? Is that what M7 has been telling you?

These posts further demonstrate the plurality of voices on Facebook as a public sphere. As noted by Gerhards and Schäfer (2009: 3), the Internet is a less constrained public sphere. For the case of Uganda, this communicative space continues to allow for diversity in opinion. Robertson et al. (2010: 13) emphasises the importance of the relationship amongst citizens who converge in the public sphere to engage in public discourse. Such a relationship, he argues, ought to be defined by critical rationality, equality, freedom of expression, and dissemination. With these in place, he posits that the public sphere can sustainably function. All these factors that Robertson and colleagues talk about are present on Facebook as a public sphere in Uganda. The rationality, as explained above, is demonstrated through both the contestation and conformity in thought by netizens, who freely express themselves.

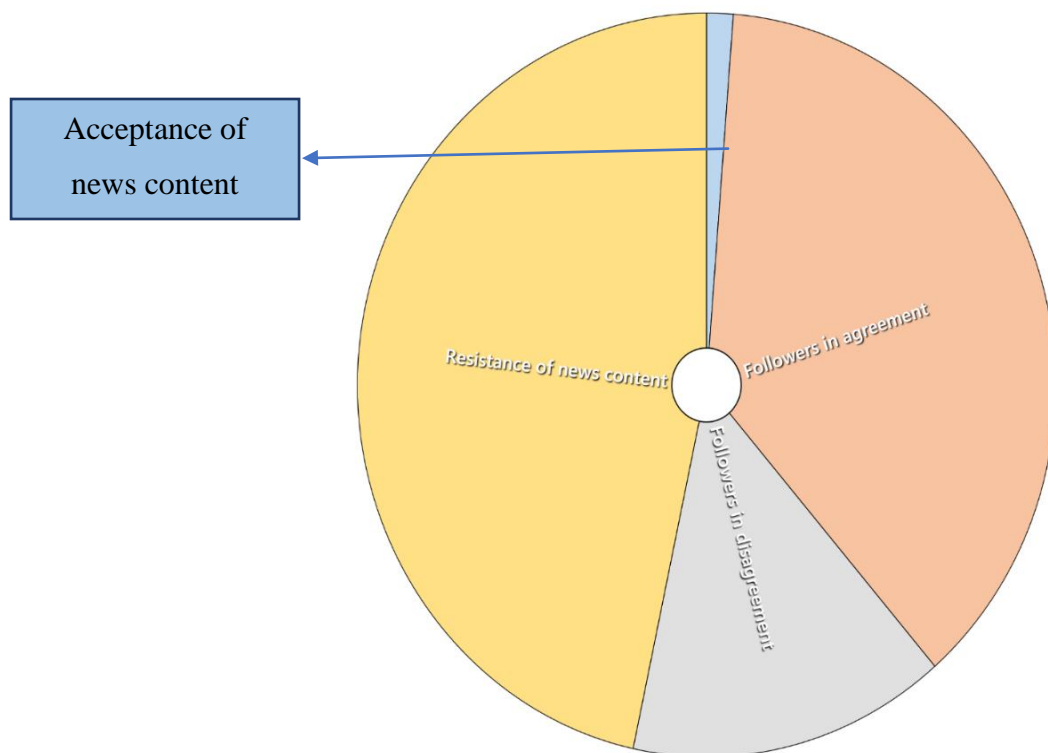
The previous chapter demonstrated how these netizens emphasise equality in the public sphere by rejecting an attempt at dominance from both the media and the state, to allow for a thriving of the public sphere. As further noted by Robertson et al. (2010), communicative action based on equality in the communication process is a prerequisite in the public sphere. This prerequisite is cognisant of the multiplicity of voices and plurality of thought.

The overall scenario of higher contestation by netizens against the state and the media can be summarised as one of antagonistic struggle for hegemony. Fairclough (1998: 149) advises that

the political discourse in contemporary politics is best understood as one that is either predominantly of struggle or complicity between or among the various agents in media discourse. He advises further that such an analysis makes it possible to determine how real or superficial apparent struggle or complicity is, and to determine who the real protagonists and antagonists are. As per this study, netizens are protagonists in their relationship with one another. They are antagonists in their relationship with the state and the media.

Below is a hierarchy chart (Nvivo) to further illustrate the spread of the dimensions of engagement on Facebook. The colours in the chart as per these dimensions are as follows: Resistance of news content- yellow, acceptance of news content- blue, Followers in agreement- peach, followers in disagreement- purple.

Figure 8: A hierarchy chart of the engagement on the NTV Facebook page



Facebook *ebimeeza* (*FaceBimeeza*): Making a connection to Radio talk shows

This chapter has presented an understanding of how Uganda's netizens and those interested in the political discourse in Uganda engage on Facebook. The dimensions of engagement are summarised as Resistance of news content, Acceptance of news content, Followers in agreement and Followers in disagreement; all of which present Facebook as a true public sphere in Uganda. This study seeks to draw a correlation between the clamped down Radio talk shows, popularly known as *ebimeeza* (refer to chapter two for a detailed discussion on this) and Facebook. The nature of engagement on Facebook is similar to that of the defunct *ebimeeza* (plural) or *ekimeeza* (singular). By extension therefore, Facebook has successfully taken up the place of these *ebimeeza*. In the context of Uganda, a combination of Facebook and the *ebimeeza* construct brings forth what this study terms as Facebook *ebimeeza*, coined together in a new term, '*FaceBimeeza*'. The next chapter investigates this new term further by linking government's involvement in the public sphere as a continuation of where it (government) left off with the clamping down of *ebimeeza*.

Chapter 7 Interference on *FaceBimeeza*

Introduction

The previous chapter has examined the nature of engagement on Facebook as a public sphere. It has shown that followers on the NTV Facebook page debate in a rational manner and hold meaningful dialogue with each other. In this dialogue, the followers bring political leaders to task, in demanding for better governance.

This chapter seeks ‘To establish the ways in which television media and institutions of government interfere with public participation on Facebook.’ It will concentrate on how both the media and institutions of government aggressively return to the Facebook platform to control discourse. Their actions cause interference in Uganda’s *FaceBimeeza* (refer to previous chapter for an understanding of this term), which until now has been shown as one of active engagement by citizens. It is important to recall that this study argues for Facebook as a confluence of three contending factions, namely, the media, ordinary citizens and the state.

As noted in chapter two, the public sphere that Habermas (1989) writes about is said to have disintegrated partly as a result of the interventionist state, interested in managing the growing contradictions of capitalism (Holub, 1991; Dahlgren, 1995). The Facebook public sphere has as per this study been interfered with by the presence of the state too, the media and private firms. This section therefore concentrates on analysing the specific ways in which this interference manifests. The directives of the state on use of Facebook are partly effected by private firms such as the telecommunication companies, which are not the focus of this study but will be mentioned briefly in the discussion.

Interference of the State in operations of the media

The interference of the state manifested through an attempt to influence media content. This was when the state meddled in newsroom decisions on the selection of news reporters for the presidential campaign trail. In addition, was the attempt to influence the content in the final

stories to be aired, and by extension to be posted on Facebook. This interference is confirmed by a response from one of the editors in the quote below:

The president was very particular about who would cover his campaign, so if you sent other people whom they have seen to produce very critical stories, it was going to be a difficult campaign for them. They would have found it very hard to gather stories, they would have been disturbed at every point. In fact, if I recall very well for the president's campaigns, that was the only team we never changed because of the way in a sense the state muscle made it impossible. NTV received a lot of heat from the State in terms of what we were covering. I remember they kicked out our team, even when they were comfortable with the two people that we had assigned. We used drone footage of the president's campaign [the footage was availed by the president's team]. I think that was a wrong call, we should not have done it. When we made an editorial decision not to use it again, they started putting us under pressure, kicked us out. I remember, we had a huge fight over it for some time. It was a very tense moment for us. Yeah, but it was a wrong call for us to use it for the first time. Those were the challenges particularly covering the president because he always looked at us as opposition (Respondent A, 14 April 2018).

News is what journalists make it as they negotiate a process partly influenced by their working environment Fenton (2010: 3). This environment incorporates considerations of the economic, social, political and technological factors. Therefore, the aforementioned efforts by the state to influence media coverage form part of the political factors that affected how journalists at NTV operated during the 2016 elections. Elections are said to be a perilous period for journalists the world over. This results from what Marie-Soleil Frère (2010: 4) describes as heightened political pressure, an increase in the number of manipulation attempts, and the need to beat deadlines. With the incumbent's team now satisfied at the successful manipulation of the choice of news team to cover their candidate, as demonstrated in the quote above, they then attempted to influence the media portrayal of the incumbent in comparison to other contenders. One of the respondents, an editor at NTV, revealed that the station occasionally had to explain itself to institutions of the state in relation to coverage of incumbent Yoweri Museveni. Soon, the

explanations had to be made to representatives of the other top contenders in the race for presidency: Amama Mbabazi and Kizza Besigye.

One of the stories that got us a little problem during the election was the story we did on the unfulfilled pledges of the President. Oh my God, the heat we got after that from every single corner! “Is this the right time to talk about the President’s unfulfilled pledges?” We had taken a very clear decision that we are going to hold everyone accountable for what they have done. If the president promised things in the financial year 2015/16, why have they not been fulfilled and he is asking for another mandate? Some of the pledges dated as far back as 10 years. So NRM was not happy about that decision we took and that was a few days into the election campaign process.

However, we reminded them that when we were doing the story on the changing faces of Amama Mbabazi, they did not complain but Amama Mbabazi did because we said this man was the attorney general of the party, was the secretary general of the party, was prime minister, was defence minister, was security minister. He previously had said that Museveni is like a god you know. He has been flip flopping on certain things, why should people trust him? We were basically asking general questions. Oh, everyone in the NRM was excited. So we told them that when you were excited about Mbabazi’s story, why are you now mad that we have asked a question about your guy?

Then we did a story on Besigye’s change of heart, and it’s only NTV that had that bite. My colleague had asked him in 2011 if he had intentions of running for presidency again. He said, “if nothing is done on the election process and the rules are not changed, and the law is not amended, I will never contest. I will not contest.” We did a story and said, this is what you said, what happened down the road? Mbabazi was happy, Museveni’s people were happy, Besigye’s people nearly finished us at the rally because we had done that story. So, you get that kind of delicate balance (Respondent B, 17 April 2018).

The explanations above by the editors are what Frère (2015) describes as heightened pressure in newsrooms and attempts to manipulate information by different political parties. Nonetheless in

this situation, citizens expect the media to be ubiquitous in its coverage irrespective of the resource constraints that the media could be faced with. Perhaps the aforementioned attempts to manipulate information in favour of one's camp could partly explain why the incumbent received the highest coverage in both print and electronic media (ACME, 2016). This situation of undue coverage is what Fairclough (1998: 148- 149) warns about in the overall reflection of hybridity of mediatised politics. Fairclough (1998) projects that the media may end up giving undue prominence to the official political system since journalistic discourse has now mixed with the other antagonistic power struggles over discourse. Such struggles are by other agents such as professional politicians, political parties and analysts.

In Uganda, the other political parties, especially of the top contenders, also raised concern over NTV's coverage of their candidates. NRM as the ruling party, received higher coverage. It can be argued therefore that at this point, the media ceased to be a neutral player in the public sphere in as far as extending equal coverage to all candidates was concerned. The counter argument can be that manipulation of the media by institutions of the state made it difficult for it to remain neutral. In addition, the ability to use statutory organs and highly placed state actors to exercise control over the media was evident in the 2016 elections. During elections, party strategists have been known to try to influence media coverage (Hopmann *et al.* 2012:174). In Uganda's 2016 polls, the state arguably wanted to use the media to extend its control of the political narrative about elections and retain power over national discourse. In this attempt, editorial staff at NTV were summoned to explain to state authorities why certain stories about the elections appeared in the manner that they did.

We were summoned to see the information minister the day Besigye's car got stuck on his way to Rukungiri. Minister Jim Muhwezi summoned us himself. We started with Museveni's story then I think we went to Amama. We were waiting for the story [Besigye's] to come, it delayed. So we took a decision to run the pictures which had been sent earlier of him getting stuck. These were earlier pictures of him struggling, getting out of the car, and helping push the car. Now, when we were running that, the story came, fully packaged with voice over, bytes and the rally. We said let us run it back to back. We were summoned the next day and asked, "whose PR [public relations] are you driving? It

is very clear where you guys are. Have you watched your bulletin from last night?" We had to explain ourselves. Then immediately we left that place, UCC had summoned us. We went to UCC and also explained ourselves. At UCC, we met the executive director and his senior management team which included the spokesperson, the legal counsel and the director for television (Respondent B, 17 April 2018).

As seen above, the state used some of its top most officials in attempting to influence media coverage. The Information Minister and the Director of UCC are top officials in far as regulating or controlling the media in Uganda is concerned. Dijk (2008: 40) observes that hierarchy of position or the rank of those signalling command within state institutions is one of the dimensions of power that are used to influence discourse and its structures.

Given the fact that news media has the potential to shape views and actions of audiences, Graber (2017: 237) explains that battles over control of mass-mediated information flows have been relentless and pervasive. This owes to the fact that there are often many contenders, but governments have been among the fiercest. Graber (2017) further argues that governments want political information to reflect their political goals while weakening those of their opponents. They therefore need the media to circulate government propaganda, counter unfavourable stories and demonise the opposition. This explanation contextualises why state operatives in Uganda summoned the NTV staff to explain its editorial policy at different periods of the electoral cycle. The strong hand of the state in attempting to control the media by using its organs to summon editorial staff is evident of the power of political discourse and therefore why competing entities online would want to be in charge of this power. Dijk 2008 (67- 68) observes that access to the mass media is important in the struggle for discourse. This is because the entities that gain preferential access to journalists, and consequently whose views get amplified, are able to influence the public. Dijk (2008) further argues that when dominant groups gain access to the media, they gain access and control over the general public. This was the situation in Uganda's 2016 elections when the NRM and its representatives sought to gain control over the media and by extension its discourse and that of the general public.

As per this study, the various interests by the state, political parties, the media and netizens all continue to struggle to have an upper hand over discourse. Whereas the state used its machinery to summon NTV staff, NTV arguably resisted this control by turning up to explain itself whenever it was summoned, as opposed to succumbing to state directives on editorial policy. The television station aired and shared on social media, stories that were critical of the state and of other political opponents. One of the journalists who covered the incumbent's campaign trail recalls such a story:

One incident that I remember was when we went to northern Uganda, Agago district, during the incumbent's campaigns. At that time, people had shunned the rally. There were no people. The organisers had to ferry people so that the big man is not ashamed. We normally went a day before the event. This gave us room to see what is really going on and that was one of the stories we did. People were being ferried from neighboring districts and counties just to come for the rally of the incumbent. But when he came, the number of people was still low. In that particular place, his opponent from the FDC had a lot of support. When we aired that story, it got us problems as NTV and in particular, I was banned from the rally twice. We actually didn't cover the next rally. We had to bargain and plead and then they brought us back(Respondent H, 23 April 2018).

In essence, the media was not about to give up its power over political discourse. With the state failing to succeed at this point, it resorted to high-handedness of restricting the available spaces for debating of political discourse as will be expounded on later.

Interference of the media on *FaceBimeeza* discussions

The study discovered that whereas the conversation on the NTV Facebook was unmoderated by the television, as for example seen in unanswered inquiries, the managers of the page occasionally deleted or pulled down some of the comments by followers of the page. This action is interpreted as a demonstration of power in the hands of the media to control discourse. The ability to control various dimensions of speech such as dictating what may or may not be spoken or written and in what language is one of the ways of exerting power over discourse (Dijk 2008:

69). Two online-content managers of the page explained that comments were deleted in instances where the conversation was considered to be going off track, or where such comments were considered inappropriate as defined by these managers themselves.

We did not moderate our Facebook platform. We tended to let people talk, say what they needed to say and for the most part, it was okay. However, on a few occasions if we got alerted to certain people spreading hate speech or deliberately misinforming others and found out in time, we would send texts may be to warn them or ban them. Chances are; some of these went unnoticed but generally speaking anything that involved a death threat of any kind is where we drew the line. You see there is some kind of argument that gets heated and while certain words are exchanged, they are within the issue being discussed. So that can go. However when something becomes completely abusive and violent and now no longer adding any value to the greater argument, we could ban or delete some of these comments and ban some of these people (Respondent F, 24 April 2018)

On Facebook generally in our setting we do have something that not particularly deletes but it hides comments where people use vulgar language. In the settings you have to put there words like I do not want to see that word bitch in the comments so it will hide it. I don't want the F word, they are so many. Imagine some of them are written in Luganda [one of the local language in Uganda]. So you have to pick a word every day because people invent words every day (Respondent G, 24 April 2018).

It is ironic that whereas citizens have initially been limited by space on television in relation to how many of their views and opinions can be aired, the same is happening on the Facebook page of a television station, and yet the Internet space has no limits. These citizens had until now found the online platforms as an unrestricted space to share their views, unlike both the televised space and the clamped down *ebimeeza* radio talk shows. It can be argued therefore that although traditional television has moved online, it has carried with it the assumed power over whose views can or cannot be aired. But this demonstration of power is contrary to Facebook as a 'free' platform. In addition, the action of deleting or hiding comments posted on Facebook is consequentially limiting of the freedom of speech and expression inherently available to citizens

in the public sphere. The counter argument of course can be an inquiry as to whether this study argues that profane language and hate speech be allowed to populate Facebook. In response to the possibility of such a counter argument, the researcher seeks to align with Reid (2017: 230) that social media are self-regulating, meaning that the various players online are known for bringing order amongst themselves and consequently correcting each other.

The control of speech by television was not only limited to followers of its Facebook page. The same control was extended to how the employees engaged on their personal Facebook pages. The study discovered that journalists at NTV were bound by in-house guidelines on how much latitude they may have in expressing themselves online and what kind of content may or may not be shared on their personal pages. This was irrespective of the fact that such content may not necessarily be news-related. These journalists, as explained by one of them, find such in-house policies to be limiting of their online freedom.

I do not only represent myself but I represent the NTV brand. So, whatever I put on my page, at the back of my mind, I have to look at both interests, my interests as a person and also the interests of the company. It affects the way I operate(Respondent J, 14 April 2018).

As noted by Rodny-Gumede (2017: 279), newsrooms grapple with the question of how much latitude to allow journalists on social media engagement. This stems from a concern that journalists may give opinions as opposed to facts. Internal regulation is also informed by the need to protect an organisation's reputation (Reid, 2017:227). This thesis nonetheless argues that the media's involvement in how its employees use Facebook is more than just a concern that journalists may give opinions over facts. It is a show of power over the entire discourse on Facebook and therefore how the different agents available online should engage. This argument fits in with the explanation by one of the editors at NTV that control on how employees use Facebook is inevitable:

The entire journalism principles we apply on TV and everywhere else applies on our social media platforms. If for example internally we do not show dead bodies, we do not

show blood on our social media platforms, you cannot do it on your platform on Facebook. We will ask you to delete it. But again you would have breached our relationship in terms of the rules of engagement on social media. All those things are clear to our journalists that you must apply both the digital policy and the social media policy in the way you actually post your content (Respondent B, 17 April 2018).

In discussing media discourse as a genre of power, Dijk (2008: 55) explains that journalists not only portray the power of others but also learn to contribute to the power of their own organisation. In this case of NTV journalists abiding by the provision to be mindful of what they post on their personal platforms, it can be argued that they have both contributed to the power of the television station and also succumbed to this power. The journalists are victims of this power, just as the other Facebook followers are. At this point none of these victims is able to overcome the media's power. As seen earlier, posts by Facebook followers can be pulled down, and now the journalists have to be careful too about what they post. It is expected of them to abide by the rules that govern the organisation. And as they succumb, they give up their own power of free expression in the public sphere. This situation of entrapment that the journalists find themselves in is explained by one of the editors as a focus on priority to the television station.

First of all, our policy does not in anyway say you cannot post news content on your platforms. It says you should be able to promote, you know, you can post the content but you should be able to drive the social media platforms more for your organisation. So, it is very clear. They are saying, you must make sure NTV is tagged in your communication, so we do not have a guy we are paying salary posting information about an event we have financed him to go and cover, on his platform. Remember we are in the business of content. So if he is at an event where there is a lot of content we are interested in and he is posting that content on his private platform, if NTV is not in that conversation, then you are actually doing us a disservice. That is the reason we have created things like hashtags, that is the reason we have created platforms where you can actually post and then everyone would then link you to NTV. However, we are very deliberate on what sort of content you are sharing (Respondent B, 17 April 2018).

The issue of control and regulation of online platforms is one that will continue to shape debates related to the inherent freedom of speech and expression in contemporary times. This is because of the communicative power that online platforms avail to citizens. Such platforms have consequently attracted different controls at both international and national levels. Most of these controls target the cumulative communication patterns of individuals and institutions. For Eriksson *et al.* (2009: 206-207), a discussion of online control needs to reflect on three facets of the Internet: access, functionality and activity. Access involves controlling the physical infrastructure such as satellites and communications dishes. Functionality relates to the quality of Internet usage including bandwidth/speed and the quality of communications software. Whereas both access and functionality determine whether people are able to use the Internet, Eriksson *et al.* (2009) observe that it is activity that has continued to be a source of debate about the Internet. Activity can be controlled by surveillance, blocking of certain features such as websites/words and by attempting to shape social and political discourse.

Interference of the state on *FaceBimeeza* discussions

Control of the Internet in Uganda is encompassing of all the above three aspects of access, functionality and activity. The government of Uganda controls access and consequently activity, to the extent of blocking the Internet entirely as was the case at the height of the 2016 elections. In examining the dimensions of power, Dijk (2008: 40) observes that some acts in the enactment of power have the ability to affect an entire nation. The directive by UCC to shut down the Internet is one such act in the exercise of power or its excesses. By this act, the state effectively interfered or caused disruption in the *FaceBimeeza* discussions, as citizens were for a while unable to engage. At this point, they were at the mercy of the excesses of state power.

The dissent against the state as demonstrated in the nature of engagement by netizens was overwhelming in comparison to support over the same. Through a demonstration of power to control discourse, government issued a directive that the entire Internet be shut down. This is indeed similar to the directive that was issued for clamping down of radio talks shows (*ebimeeza*). By implication, the reaction of the government of Uganda to criticism from citizens and other actors (irrespective of whether this criticism is constructive or not) is one of stifling the

available spaces for engagement. Such stifling in form of closure or shutting down of social media platforms is contrary to the inherent right to freedom of speech and expression. Nonetheless, this is how government controls access. It is from the demonstration of such actions of power that Foucault questions if power is not war-like domination. He questions if problems of power therefore ought not to be conceived in terms of relations to war. Foucault seeks to understand power as a generalised war that at times takes on forms of peace and the state. He looks at society as a place where permanent war is waged sometimes between classes or in the entire society (Gordon 1980: 123).

Government's demonstration of power and control is further seen to rotate around the person of the president. As noted by Jeffrey Peake (2001:69), presidents are the most influential agenda setters for national governments. And as per this study, the person of the president certainly wields the highest power and his opinion about an issue cannot be ignored. During the shutdown, the head of state came out to defend this action, describing it as a necessary security measure to avert lies (Abrahamsen and Bareebe, 2016). It can be argued that the president's decision to defend the shutdown was informed by the high volume of dissent (resistance) against the state. The president's views and prioritisation of issues can be shaped by external factors, including the media (Peake, 2001). Jeff Yates and Andrew Whitford (2005: 577) agree and observe that the president has the ability to attract national attention to issues that he deems to be worth serious consideration. This was true in Uganda as demonstrated in the president's defense of shutting down social media. The president's defence of this shutdown was the ultimate point of demonstration of the power of the state. It further confirms that Facebook was the 'battle ground' for control of discourse by the media, citizens and the state.

It is important to note that functionality of the Internet in Uganda is in the hands of telecommunication companies such as MTN, Africell, Airtel, Uganda Telecommunications Limited (UTL), Smart telecom and Smile telecom that sell Internet data. In addition to these are the broadband service providers such as Infocom. Since the government does not have direct control of functionality, it issues directives to these private firms to effect Internet shutdowns. This directive, as explained by one of the editors at NTV was likely as polling day drew near:

I do not know if you are aware that a few weeks to that happening, the UCC Executive Director said that they had the capacity to shut down social media. A lot of us laughed about it, we did not believe them but through some of our sources, we were actually told it was very possible. They just needed to go to the source and ask the telecoms to switch us off, which is exactly what they did. So, go to the telecoms and ask them to turn off social media sites just like they do in China (Respondent B, 17 April 2018).

This scenario of control is similar to what Balkin (2018: 2014- 16), describes as a triangle. One of the corners of this triangle is taken up by nation-states and supranational organisations, the second by infrastructure companies, and on the last corner are the mass media, civil organisations and protesters. Balkin argues that the first two categories in this triangle regulate the speech of the last category, which are sometimes able to navigate such regulation through protests. This regulation mainly targets controlling of the Internet infrastructure. Balkin argues further that this is contrary to the old-school regulation which targeted individuals with threats of fines or imprisonment. Nonetheless, Balkin observes that both old-school and new-school speech regulation co-exist to ensure control in present times. In relation to Uganda, this speech triangle is actualised as the state, gives directives to infrastructure companies to stifle conversation and debate on *FaceBimeeza*. By implication, both the ordinary citizens and the media have to contend with this control.

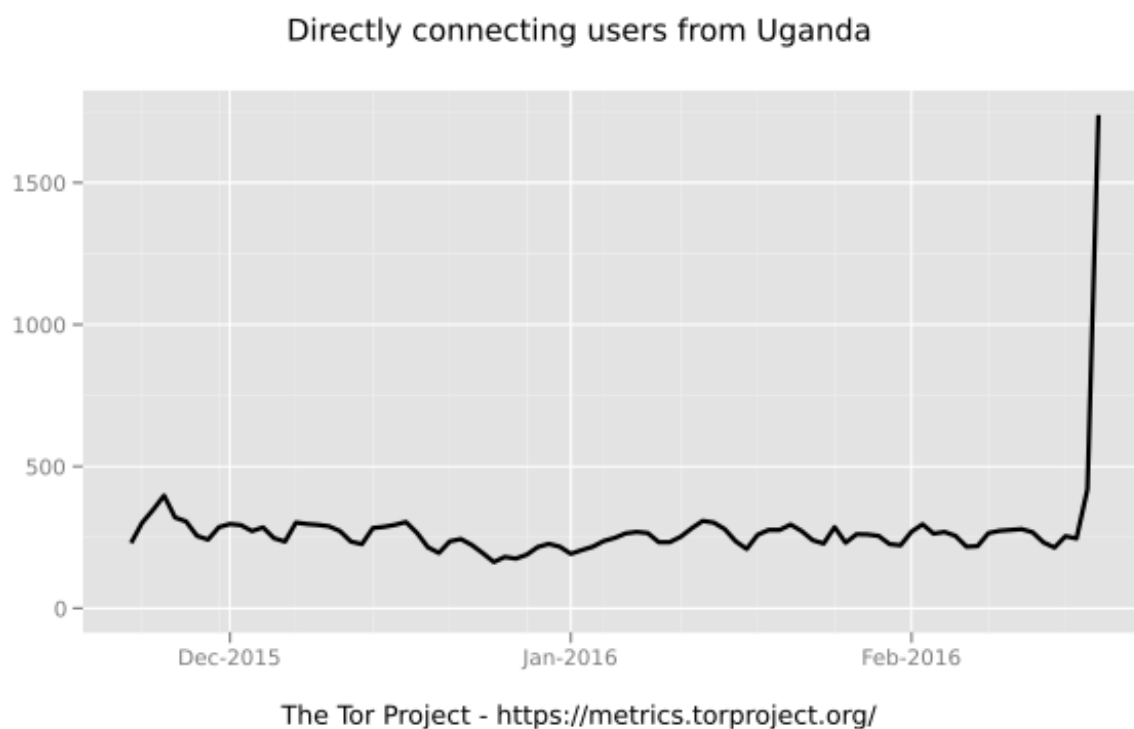
The irony is that whereas NTV has the ability to control the speech of followers on its page by way of deleting comments, it is also subject to control of these telecom companies and consequently by the state. This is the speech triangle that Balkin (2018) describes, in which nation-states take up one corner, and infrastructure companies take up the other corner to control mass media and ordinary citizens/protesters. At this point, the power of the television station is arguably neutralised too and the state is the at this point the ‘winner’ of this struggle for hegemony- albeit temporarily. The television station is consequently lumped with the netizens, forming what Fairclough (1998: 148) refers to as protagonists. These protagonists arguably relate to the state in an antagonistic manner. To sum it up, Eriksson *et al.* (2009: 207- 208) observe that governments, businesses and NGOs at national and international levels control different aspects of the Internet, with none of them able to control the entire spectrum. Whereas governments take

an upper hand in controlling access, functionality and online activity, private firms take charge of the infrastructure—both hardware and software.

But the control of the Internet by the state as seen in the shutdown above was short-lived. A key finding of this research is that on 18 February 2018 when Uganda was subjected to a social media blackout by government, the volume of comments from followers of the NTV Facebook page remained high. This was partly as a result of the ability to circumvent state surveillance and blocking of the Internet through use of virtual private networks. Phillips and Atuhaire (2016) observe that close to 1.5 million Ugandans managed to download the necessary software and continued engaging on social media about the elections. Figure 7.1 below demonstrates the high volume of online activity ahead of the 2016 polls, part of which period social media was shut down in Uganda.

Faced with increasing surveillance and logging of the surfing behaviour of individuals by both state and non-state actors, Erikson *et al.* (2009) further observe that encryption software has been used to escape such monitoring. The use of such software is indeed true for Uganda where state surveillance of online activity by citizens and civil society is a reality (Chibita and Ugangu 2017).

Figure 9: Online activity in Uganda for the period December 2015—February 2016



In essence both NTV and followers of its Facebook page managed to bypass the blackout. In fact, the story with the second highest number of comments out of the eight stories chosen for analysis on NTV's Facebook page was posted on the day of the social media blackout. This is the story titled, 'ED UCC, Godfrey Mutabazi says Mobile Money and social media were shut down because there was information that people were using these to bribe voters.'

Figure 10: UCC's explanation of the Internet shutdown in Uganda



This story attracted 422 comments, coming second to the one that declared incumbent Museveni winner, which attracted 539 comments (see chapter four on how selection of stories was done). As further noted by Phillips and Atuhaire (2016), the attempt to silence conversations on Facebook and other social media platforms instead caused the loudest reactions. For one of the editors at NTV, this overwhelming reaction by netizens was out of curiosity:

When government shut down social media pages, people wanted to find out what it is that they are trying to hide. Even those who probably did not have interest before were saying, let me go in and post whatever I feel. I think it was curiosity and you see the election season, Uganda is a highly political country, with a lot of interest in politics. People like discussing politics and if you go to social gatherings of villagers, people are talking about politics (Respondent D, 13 April 2018).

Not only was the circumventing of the Internet shut down a show of curiosity as explained by the quote above, it was also a demonstration of power in the hands of netizens to control discourse in the public sphere and to resist government interference. By circumventing the shutdown, these followers managed to regain control of the public sphere from private firms and the state. And so

did television media, which as seen above, was also a victim of the shutdown. The media's position is one that keeps shifting. At one point the media, just like the state, is a powerful entity with the ability to control the actions of Facebook followers by deleting comments. At another point, it is a victim of the excesses of the state and is affected by Internet shutdowns. On the side of ordinary citizens, this ability to retain control of the Facebook public sphere was the second during the 2016 elections. The first incident, coming after an earlier one (see chapter six) in which these followers resisted both the media and the state's attempts to control discourse by influencing the discursive agenda. By implication, Facebook has proved to be a true public sphere in Uganda where netizens converge as equals to engage in political debates.

Reminiscent of prior events of successful use of social media such as the 2007 mobilisation against the sale of Mabira forest (Chibita and Ugangu, 2017: 249), the walk-to-work protests (Ojambo, 2016: 33), it was unlikely that Facebook followers would give up on using the platform at the height of the 2016 polls. This enthusiasm for new media in Uganda proves the presence of online public spheres (Javuru, 2013: 373). For a country whose Internet penetration is at 42.5% as per the 2015/2016 Annual Market and Industry report by UCC, and still growing, it can be argued that Facebook and other social media platforms are the way of the future for public engagement on civic matters.

Although Facebook has arguably been used to circulate falsehoods and manipulate information in favour of one's camp during elections (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017: 221), this was not the case in Uganda's 2016 elections as seen off the NTV Facebook page. The page reveals rational debate of issues as citizens' dialogue with each other, prompting government's excessive demonstration of power through the aforementioned shut down. One of the journalists who covered the 2016 elections at NTV confirms the volume of activity ahead of the polls:

Government came out and said that the reason as to why social media was shut down was to try to reduce on incitement, it was a very volatile period. But in my opinion, it was gagging the mouths and also restricting freedom of speech because some of us were giving constant updates.(Respondent L, 24 April 2018).

The liberating power of Facebook has seen governments continue to censor it (Gumede, 2016; Shirky, 2011). For the case of Uganda, such censorship is contrary to Article 29 (1) of the country's 1995 constitution, allowing for freedom of speech and expression. But as noted by Chibita and Ugungu (2017: 252), control of social media is sometimes justified on grounds of countering terrorism and shutting dissenting voices. This then begs the question on where such occasional and often unpredictable censorship places the freedom to participate on Facebook, especially since the platform is inherently self-regulating. Some of the online content managers interviewed at NTV are supportive of some level of regulation of online platforms.

I think there are people who misuse social media. We have so many pseudo accounts purporting to be NTV Uganda and they post content attacking ministers, attacking businessmen and these people come in complaining. Some think of taking us to court but the content is not ours. If the regulation is to such kinds of people who post fake news that is okay. But not to gag free speech (Respondent E, 19 April 2018).

In conclusion, it is important to note that indeed television media and institutions of government interfere with the public sphere, but this interference has not proven to be capable of completely dismantling the sphere's discursive nature.

A more recent interference on the part of government in Uganda has been the introduction of a social media tax. This tax, as discussed in chapter two, has been implemented despite contestation from citizens who have decried the limitations to freedom of expression that come with it. This is similar to arguments in Britain and elsewhere in Europe when taxation was contested in an effort to safeguard the unlimited formation of public opinion on pertinent issues (Lee, 1976: 22). In addition, efforts to shut down Facebook and other social media for the case of Uganda have proven futile. This is coupled with the fact that the Facebook platform is largely unmoderated, even when followers are posting off the page of a media house. Several incidences of use of social media reveal that Facebook can be used to bring about change. Uganda is no exception, given the high levels of engagement. The researcher is nonetheless cognisant of the uneven access to the Internet in Uganda (Kalinaki, 2016), which in itself hampers the ability for online engagement (Mitchelstein and Boczowski, 2009: 575). Nonetheless, as Internet

penetration improves in Uganda, it will certainly come with improved levels of online engagement.

Chapter 8 Conclusion: Synthesis of thought

Introduction

This study set out to investigate how Facebook followers engaged with news content off the page of a local television station, NTV. The study investigates the use of Facebook as a public sphere in Uganda. The study is premised on the increasing stifling of public communication spaces by the government of Uganda, contrary to provisions of the 1995 constitution that guarantee freedom of speech and expression. With the hindsight of closure of radio talk shows in the country, the study investigates how citizens who have taken to Facebook as an alternative space for commentary on the country's political discourse use the platform. On this platform, a struggle for control of the political discourse is seen amongst the netizens/citizens, the media and the state. Whereas the platform indeed avails an alternative space for debating the country's political discourse, the government of Uganda shuts down Facebook and the entire Internet at the height of the 2016 presidential polls.

The study therefore sought an understanding of the nature of engagement by followers of the NTV Facebook page. NTV is one of the television stations seen to be critical of the state. And Facebook is the most popular social media site in Uganda.

The study set out with the following objectives:

1. To determine how Nation Television used Facebook in engaging followers on the political discourse during Uganda's 2016 elections.
2. To examine the nature of engagement on Facebook as a public sphere.
3. To establish the ways in which television media and institutions of government interfere with public participation on Facebook.

Contextualising the study

Freedom of speech and expression in Uganda

It can be argued that freedom of speech and expression in Uganda has frequently been a struggle and a concern of ordinary citizens. Right from the time of the colonial administration to the present media regulation under the NRM government, both the media and the population it serves have had to contend with and challenge several attempts sometimes unsuccessfully at denying them the inherent right to freedom of speech and expression. As seen earlier, these factions (media and citizens) have over the years registered some significant successes in this struggle. Up to the time of Uganda's independence in 1962, repression under colonial rule was contested through the alternative publication of indigenous and often nationalist-inclined newspapers. Whereas some of these newspapers were banned or failed to sustain production owing to the fines imposed on them, and other direct and indirect obstacles, this did not stop other titles from emerging.

But even after independence, this struggle continued as the first governments attempted to turn the media into a conduit for their government propaganda. For example, this was seen under the government of Presidents Amin and both Obote governments (Tabaire, 2007). Such attempts were sometimes successful. For example, when in the 1970s the only television station in Uganda, Uganda Television, and the only radio station, Radio Uganda, were widely regarded as mainly presenting the voice of government (Chibita and Fourie, 2007). It can be argued that this repression has never stopped even if the NRM government was initially understood to be more accommodative of the Ugandan press (Tabaire, 2007). The fact that media freedom has continued to be stifled to the extent of generating self-censorship (Sekeba, 2017) is in itself evidence of such continued repression.

The regulatory framework in Uganda has been designed in a way that limits press freedoms. For example, section 7 of the 2013 UCC Act gives powers to the Minister to "give policy guidelines to the Commission [Uganda Communications Commission] regarding the performance of its functions. The Act further compels the Commission to comply with such policy guidelines. It can be argued that when at the height of the 2016 elections, the then Information Minister Hon. Jim

Muhwezi together with officials from UCC summoned editors from NTV to explain their editorial policies in relation to particular stories, they (Minister and UCC) had the backing of these regulatory provisions. But as explained by one of the editors (see chapter seven), the television station was saved by the fact that they had endeavoured to balanced the coverage and investigation of promises by all top contenders in the presidential race. This repression has now been extended to social media by way of occasional shutdowns and taxation. With the repression of the media comes *ipso facto* the repression of citizens as well. It can be concluded therefore that the struggle for freedom of speech and expression by both the media and citizens in Uganda continues.

Facebook and mass media

Facebook has made mass media more interactional by allowing traditional media to extend into the online sphere. In this sphere, mass media is able to solicit views and ideas both for news and about news and other current affairs. Whereas this extension of the newsroom and sharing of information is true for mass media, it is also true for other entities operating in the public sphere. These include the Facebook followers and the state, who are now not necessarily reliant on mass media for their information needs. Facebook has made it possible for these other entities to produce and share news from their perspective, often times ahead of traditional media. The traditional position of mass media as the sole bearer of facts on events and other issues is now therefore challenged.

The news and subsequent ensuing discourses on Facebook are now not necessarily confined to the presentation and framing by the media. The implication of this is that the interactive nature of Facebook arguably has the potential to change the mass media logic of traditional media from one of disseminating information, to one that continuously allows engagement as well. This is especially so if mass media continue to have presence on Facebook and other social media platforms. But such engagement can only take place if mass media allow themselves to be more responsive to the online audience.

The theoretical approach

This study is premised on the increasing use of Facebook by citizens, the media and government in Uganda. The study chose the country's 2016 presidential elections to examine how these three factions interact on Facebook.

The study therefore situates itself in the theory of the public sphere by Jurgen Habermas (1989), reborn in contemporary times through social media such as Facebook. Whereas Habermas sounds the demise of this theory with the onset of mass media, other scholars argue for its rebirth in the burgeoning social media platforms. Social media is looked at as a limitless platform connecting societies across the world. The vast reach and diverse options to enable engagement in forms such as videos, photos, text and other graphic representations on social media have translated into an unprecedented source of power to citizens, governments and organisations, enabling them to communicate beyond borders (Cheung, Chiu and Lee, 2011).

The forcefulness with which Facebook as the leading social media platform is used in political discourse therefore implies that the public sphere is not only alive, but is almost limitless in connecting communities. These communities keep abreast with political developments not only in their respective countries but in the wider web of various communities connected online. With this hindsight, the study analyses Facebook at the height of the aforementioned elections, during which period social media and the Internet were shut down in Uganda for a while. From this perspective, the study attempts to build on theorising of the public sphere from an African context, to fill a gap in literature (Caldwell, 2017: 121).

The study further employs the agenda setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972) to make meaning of the choice of traditional media in joining the online public sphere. Traditional media is known for its ability to set the agenda for public discourse. And as McCombs and Shaw (1972) put it, the media do not tell people what to think but do tell them what to think about. This study therefore interrogates whether the traditional media has carried with it its agenda-setting role, in order to influence the political discourse happening online. The study concludes with an

inclination towards the demise of traditional media's agenda setting role in the context of social media.

The methodological approach: synthesis of Habermas and Foucault

The study is qualitative in nature and premises in the interpretivist philosophy to understand the behaviour of Facebook followers. Consequently, the research assumes a subjective position in studying Facebook. Qualitative research is said to have the ability to transform the world and make it visible through interpretive, material practices (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 3). The study employs online ethnography (netnography) and in-depth interviews to enable detailed gathering of information on the political discourse on Facebook. Data is analysed through a combination of discourse analysis and thematic analysis. The discourse analysis situates the study in political communication and discusses discourse as it relates to the enactment of power by powerful groups in society, and how such power is discursively resisted by the less powerful.

By looking at Facebook as a public sphere and by discussing how the entities meeting in this public sphere interact, this thesis has brought two theorists- Habermas and Foucault together. And as argued later in the section, this thesis finds commonality in their thoughts as applied to the context of Uganda. The two theorists are said to have disregarded each other's works at different points of their writing. For example, Nancy Love (1989: 270), explains how Habermas argued that Foucault was anti-modern, due to the latter's rejection of views on modernity such as the assertion that man was likely to be erased, similar to a face drawn in the sand. Habermas further castigated Foucault for belonging to a group of young conservatives, which according to Holub (1985: 242) is evidence that his works were not to be well received at least in Germany unlike France and the United States of America. Holub (1985) further notes that part of this criticism owes to the fact that some of Foucault's writings were seen to be obscure and intentionally evasive. This, nonetheless, is not to say that the gaps in some of Foucault's works tantamount to an overall rejection of his contribution towards politics and scholarship (Holub, 1985: 242).

This thesis is more concerned with the views of both Habermas and Foucault on discourse as it applies to humanity. From the point of view of the public sphere, discourse or conversation takes place in the public sphere and as observed by Habermas (1989), such conversation is underpinned by rationality. Holub (1985: 246) observes that this concern for rationality is a point of similarity in both the works of Habermas and Foucault. He argues that the fact that both of them write during the same historical period, denoted by the holocaust and failures of socialism, could explain the similarity. But on the notion of discourse, Holub (1985: 247) argues that the views of Habermas and Foucault are divergent. Habermas understands discourse as a meta-linguistic interaction and talks of the consensus of free subjects who apply language in reaching agreement. Habermas consequently envisions a realm in which power is detached from debates. In this realm, participants enter on equal terms and put aside personal interests. In this postulation, Habermas idealises discourse. On the other hand, Foucault presents the argument that power is resident in discourse and that it is implicated in all knowledge.

But the findings of this research present a different scenario in relation to the arguments of Habermas and Foucault. This thesis seeks to draw a correlation between Habermas and Foucault on discourse and power. I argue that there is a possibility of common thought in what each of them is saying. Here is how: Habermas' notion of the public sphere and discourse, also as argued above by Holub (1985), allows for subjects to interact freely and on equal terms. This therefore implies that any attempts at using discourse to exert power in this realm of debate disrupts its discursive nature. If Foucault argues for power as a discursive relationship and that no one should be seen to wield it over another person or group of people (McHoul and Grace, 1993: 21), then it can be argued that Foucault and Habermas are saying the same thing. Foucault is against the extremes of power that allow official discourse to over assert itself (McHoul and Grace, 1993: 21), while Habermas is arguably in support of equality in discourse in the public sphere. From this perspective, both of them are advocating for free speech and rational debate, unhampered by a show of power or might, or as seen in this thesis unhampered by an attempt by the state and the media to have control of the public sphere of rational debate. It can be concluded therefore that Foucault and Habermas' ideas on discourse and power, interpreted as ideas on the discursive nature on the public sphere of Facebook in Uganda, are valid and similar. Foucault and Habermas

therefore thrive in Uganda's context and there is hardly any lost opportunity for synthesis of thought by both.

Findings of the study and their implications

From *ekimeeza* to *FaceBimeeza*: An invigorated public sphere in Uganda

In establishing how the Facebook followers engaged on the platform, the study revealed that these followers engaged in a rational manner while debating the news content. In this rationality, the followers use Facebook as a public sphere in which they hold government accountable by resisting oppression of political opponents, as reported in the news. In what the study terms as 'resistance', this construct is seen in the following dimensions: contesting media framing of issues, demand for better governance, rejection of interference in the public sphere, and resistance by sharing experiences of better practice from elsewhere. The followers of the page are seen to support one another, as they speak almost in unison against the aforementioned oppressive actions of the state.

In the election period, most of the stories that attracted a high number of comments on Facebook and were consequently analysed for this study, showed opposition presidential candidates in a constrained electoral environment ahead of the polls. The Facebook followers therefore demanded explanations from the state and its machinery. The debate surrounding the Facebook discussion is rational and centres on a demand for good governance. This debate is not just a demonstration of voters supporting their preferred candidates and therefore using Facebook to discredit the state. Rather, these followers present their own account of events. In addition, the resistance and contestation of media framing of issues manifests throughout the period of elections as per the stories selected. Below is a list of stories selected for analysis:

- January 1, 2016: Mbabazi expresses concerns over being shadowed by unknown men. Mbabazi fears that the men could be harbouring a sinister plot to harm him
- January 3, 2016: Police deploy to block Besigye's school visits. Besigye tricked police who were trailing him and sneaked to a dam where animals share water with locals

- January 5, 2016: EC says the recent ban on visits to hospitals and places of worship for presidential candidates was not based on any law but on concern for privacy of patients and worshippers
- January 6, 2016: Rugunda warns Besigye against defiance campaign. The premier also defended the role of crime preventers, saying they are critical in reinforcing the police that is thin on the ground
- February 14, 2016: Debate panelist Shaka Ssali barred from asking president questions. For him to appear at the second debate, a government spokesperson has revealed that some conditions had to be met
- February 18, 2016: ED UCC, Godfrey Mutabazi says Mobile Money and social media were shut down because there was information that people were using these to bribe voters
- February 19, 2016: Besigye and Mugisha Muntu have been arrested in Najjanakumbi
- February 20, 2016: Kiggundu: The commission declares candidate Yoweri Kaguta Museveni as the elected President of Uganda this 20 February 2016

This thesis therefore posits that in Uganda, Facebook is a true public sphere, where rational debate takes place. Facebook followers are seen to successfully safeguard this public sphere from manipulation by both the media and the state. The media's manipulation is seen in attempting to be the sole bearer of topics for discussion, while that of the state is seen through the closure of Facebook. In both instances, Facebook followers manage to overcome this manipulation and regain control of the Facebook public sphere, where they continue to debate the country's political discourse. The study contests the assertion by Javuru (2013: 372) that online discussions in Uganda are not based on rationality. The study further draws a correlation between the defunct radio talk shows popularly known as *ebimeeza*, with engagement on Facebook.

Considering that the prior equivalent of a public sphere that manifested in these radio talk shows was clamped down by the state in 2009, this thesis argues that citizens have now found its replacement on Facebook. Facebook is arguably Uganda's new online *ekimeeza* (singular) or *ebimeeza* (plural). Whereas the state described Facebook as a place for *lugambo* (gossip)

(Kimuyu 2018), the Facebook discussions as per this thesis are not of gossip or cheap talk. The empirical evidence in this study has demonstrated that Facebook is far from the alleged descriptor as a place for *lugambo*. It is *ekimeeza* for rational debate.

On the Facebook *ebimeeza*, herein coined as *FaceBimeeza*, the citizens/followers are at liberty to exercise their freedom of speech and expression, as provided for in the country's 1995 constitution. This is done oblivious of the well-known state surveillance of online activity, so much that citizens dare call the person of the president to task. Unlike the clamped down radio *ebimeeza*, the *FaceBimeeza* avail an unlimited space and allows for more creativity in expression of views. Such creativity, as argued by Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2011: 1340), can take on various forms such as text, audio, video or other graphic representations.

It can be argued therefore that the Facebook *ebimeeza* (*FaceBimeeza*) are much more empowering to those who engage. This argument is cognisant of the fact that some comments posted on Facebook and deemed inappropriate can be pulled down or deleted by the television station. The station justifies such deletions as targeted at hate speech and vulgar language, but not reasoned arguments. The study was unable to analyse some of the deleted comments for a proper understanding of the structuring of their content, since they were already deleted and no record was available. Nonetheless, traditionally, the public sphere has been known to be a space for rational debate, not hate speech or vulgarities. In addition, Facebook, just like other social media platforms, is self-regulating. It can therefore be argued that the deletion of some of the alleged inappropriate Facebook comments by NTV does not take away the overall constructive engagement seen on the platform. In addition, the online content managers at NTV explained that the platform was in most cases left unmoderated, partly as a result of insufficient staffing levels to monitor all posts and also to allow the followers to debate freely.

Furthermore, the Facebook followers were seen to comment on the news content at any time of the day and in subsequent days, long after a story is posted. This is evidence that unlike the physical *ebimeeza* that required participants to be present in the public houses where these *ebimeeza* were hosted, or to listen and call-in with their comments (Nassanga, 2008; Brisset-Foucault, 2013), the online version is not time bound. By implication, Facebook can therefore be

harnessed to allow for almost unrestricted feedback between the state and citizens of Uganda. This feedback is unrestricted in the sense that the study is cognisant of limitations in access to the Internet across the country. Political conversation on interactive technologies allows for citizens' opinions and perspectives to be represented. Such technologies can therefore be harnessed to create a strong democracy, bringing citizens together for discussion and deliberation on community and policy matters (Stromer-Galley, 2017: 837).

Traditional media on Facebook: Implications for agenda setting

This study has posited that traditional media of television operates in fear of being overtaken by Facebook. Indeed, the confession of one of the editors at NTV that Facebook is a threat, says it best: *“Our biggest threat every time we have a meeting is that Facebook is our biggest competition. It is not the mobile phone, it is Facebook because Facebook can go any platform. It is on the computer, it is on the tablet and it is on the phone,”* (Respondent B, 17 April 2018). Consequently, television has deliberately joined Facebook to extend its newsroom and attempt to influence the online agenda of the country's political discourse. On Facebook, television is desirous of retaining control as the initiator of topics for national discourse - similar to its agenda setting role in the offline mode.

However, this is not possible as the political discourse on Facebook remains in the hands of Facebook followers. These followers express their freedom of speech in debating the topics introduced by the media and debating other topics of choice. The study therefore agrees with McCombs (2005) on the argument that traditional media's agenda setting role faces demise in the online environment. Uganda's Facebook public sphere has neutralised television's agenda setting role. This has been demonstrated by Facebook followers' ability to take charge of the political discourse, conclusively discussing issues from their experiences.

In addition, the concept of truth as presented by the media is now contested. The truth and accuracy as reflected in news stories, as often guided by ethos of journalism, now has to contend with another truth and presentation via issues raised by Facebook followers. This implies that media is no longer the sole bearer of the true account of events. In discussing the notion of truth,

Foucault observes that truth is produced by allowing several contestations of phenomenon, and that such truth has effects on power. Societies therefore shape what is agreeable to them as truth and what type of discourse is permissible (Gordon, 1980: 131-132):

Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish between true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth, the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. Truth is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is an object under diverse forms of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); It is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is an issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles)

McHouland Grace (1993: 19) agree with Foucault that there are multiple truths. They add that of importance is to understand which of these truths takes precedent at any one time. In the setting of social media, a combination of reports from traditional media and online submissions from ordinary people are crucial in projecting a more reflective impression of events (Barnes, 2012). This argument is not oblivious of the fact that social media has been used and continues to be used to circulate falsehoods. It is rather a presentation of empirical evidence of a true account of events for the case of Uganda's 2016 election period.

Control in the public sphere: A failed attempt to curb political discourse

Whereas Facebook is a free platform for all its congregants, the study discovered that followers of Facebook in Uganda still have to contend with two levels of regulation or control. One of these levels is by the media house and the second by the state. Whereas the above section has shown

followers overpowering the media in influencing the agenda, the media arguably retains control over their posts since it can choose to delete these posts or ban/block particular followers from the page. But as seen in the non-responsive nature of television, coupled with the overwhelming number of posts, Facebook followers retained control of the discourse on Facebook over the media. Television staff members were unable to monitor each and every post during the 2016 elections. The overwhelming number of posts was therefore further confirmation that regulation of Facebook is in contrast with its inherent nature as a public sphere. The public sphere is meant to be a place of unrestricted entry, exit and participation. Indeed, even attempts by the state to regulate this space by way of shutting down social media were futile as people used virtual private networks to bypass the blockade. It is based on these two premises: i) the ability to overcome the media and ii) the ability to circumvent control by the state, that this study confirms that Facebook is more in the hands of ordinary citizens and is a public sphere.

In Habermas' narrative (1989), the intervention of the state and the media is said to have led to the disintegration of the public sphere. In contrast with today's Facebook public sphere, this study argues that the intervention of the state and the media is unlikely to cause disruption of the public sphere. This could partly be because, as noted by Eriksson et al. (2009), the Internet is not entirely in the control of any institution. Institutions are only able to control certain aspects of the Internet. Social media as a public sphere will by implication hopefully continue to thrive in Uganda.

Contribution to the body of knowledge

The theory of the public sphere

This study has contributed to theorising of the public sphere in the context of Uganda by examining the activities of the state, the media and Facebook followers. These entities are seen to be in conflict over control of the public sphere, as each of them struggles to control discourse. The Facebook followers emerge 'victorious' in controlling this discursive space.

The study has established that similar to the public sphere of the feudal middle ages, Facebook has provided a space for rational debate by Ugandans. These citizens congregate in this sphere as

equals and debate issues from their experiences. It is from this perspective that the study has linked Facebook to the clamped down radio talk shows and coined a new term, Facebook *ekimeeza* or Facebook *ebimeeza*. These online *ebimeeza* allow citizens to exercise their freedom of speech and expression as constitutionally provided for. And as such, the Facebook followers are seen to be protective of this public sphere. This protectiveness gets to its peak when followers bypass the government shut down of social media platforms and use Facebook to scorn the state for its failed attempt.

The Facebook public sphere is in addition not limiting to Ugandans only. Comments on the NTV Facebook page were noticed from other followers from neighbouring countries such as Kenya. The Facebook public sphere is therefore inclusive beyond borders. In addition, this all-inclusive Facebook public sphere is accommodative of both men and women. The gender difference does not arise to weigh-in on submissions. The Facebook followers debate purely based on merit.

The agenda setting theory

In relation to the agenda setting theory, the study brings forth the argument that the agenda setting role of the media conflicts with the interactive nature of Facebook. This is especially so owing to presence of various agendas from the state and netizens, which conflict with that of traditional media. The study has established that in this conflict of agendas and by extension a power struggle over who controls the political discourse, the Facebook followers retain an upper hand. Consequently, traditional media's agenda setting role is threatened in the online public sphere. As pointed out by Roese (2018: 315) users of Facebook and other social media produce and share content amongst themselves, consequently bypassing the media's agenda setting function. In addition, issues of concern come from several places and not just the media. Such places, as argued by Erbring et al. (1980) include personal experiences and conditions in the real world.

Methodology

Methodologically, the study has presented a combination of netnography and in-depth interviews in analysing the posts on a traditional media's Facebook page. The particular steps of how this online ethnography was conducted were helpful in understanding the nature of engagement on Facebook in Uganda. Explanations on how the study handled the big data synonymous with enquiry on social media were availed. The discursive analysis has combined the works of Foucault and Habermas in relation to discourse and power in the public realm.

Confines of the study

It should be noted that whereas the elections in Uganda are called presidential and parliamentary elections, this study focuses only on the presidential aspect of these elections. The reason for not tackling the parliamentary election is that it has to be judged on a different set of criteria. There are hundreds of candidates, each with individual circumstances. Such a study would produce an umbrella conclusion. But by prioritising the presidential aspect of the elections, the study is much more focused and can more clearly discern the impact of the political discourse on Facebook as a public sphere and how the agenda-setting role of the media was orchestrated. The elections attracted eight presidential aspirants, most of whom took their campaign to social media.

In addition, whereas there are several social media platforms used in Uganda, this study concentrates on the use of the Facebook platform of NTV for the period of the 2016 elections. This is justified by the fact that Facebook is the most popularly used platform in the country. In relation to this focus is the fact that the study investigates NTV, a television station seen to be critical of the state. It is possible that the Facebook followers of this station could be more orientated towards a critical approach to the state and its machinery. By implication, the overwhelming resistance in the nature of engagement can perhaps be linked to this orientation. A separate study, focusing on a Facebook page of the government owned broadcaster may produce different results. Nonetheless, the rationality seen on the Facebook page of NTV would arguably exonerate this study, given the fact that the submissions from followers come off as well

reasoned and are diverse in nature. And of course, being a political matter, it might also be argued that enemies as well as sympathisers are attracted to such Facebook sites.

Areas for further research in the sphere

Whereas this study has highlighted how the government of Uganda directed telecommunication companies to effect the Internet shut down at the height of the 2016 elections, a proper analysis of how these companies control activity on social media in general minus government directives requires a follow up investigation. These companies, such as MTN, Airtel and Uganda Telecom compete in selling Internet and data services (Ndiwalana and Tusubira, 2012). It would be instructive to research how this competition affects Internet users in Uganda.

Another interesting study in the wider sphere would be a comparison of the issue agendas as seen off traditional media and those seen off the pages of social media influencers. It would be revealing to interrogate the reciprocity between these two agenda to know if the media agenda is picked up and replicated by Facebook/social media followers to influence debate elsewhere. This kind of study would likely have ramifications for the ripple effect of the agenda setting role of the media in the online space. It would conceptualise and debate the argument and assertion that the media's agenda setting role faces demise.

Whereas this thesis has focused specifically on television, a succeeding study could be undertaken to compare how other traditional media of print and radio interact with their online audiences across the official social media platforms.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Gatekeeper's letter from NTV-1



August 9th 2016

Marion Olga Alina,
University of KwaZulu Natal,
Durban, South Africa

Dear Madam/Sir,

RE: CLEARANCE TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY AT NTV UGANDA

Reference is made to your request to conduct a research study on digital platforms and mobile apps in shaping media – a case study of NTV's coverage of the 2016 elections in Uganda dated 10th June 2016. You indicated that this research will be exclusive to NTV Uganda and not other competing media houses.

Your request has been granted; please get in touch with Collins Mugume (our Head of Marketing & Digital) to offer you the necessary assistance.

You will be able to access our digital platforms including Facebook, Twitter and You Tube accounts.

We will appreciate if at the end of the research, NTV Uganda gets a tailored report identifying areas that can help us improve.

Yours Sincerely,

For: AFRICA BROADCASTING (U) LIMITED

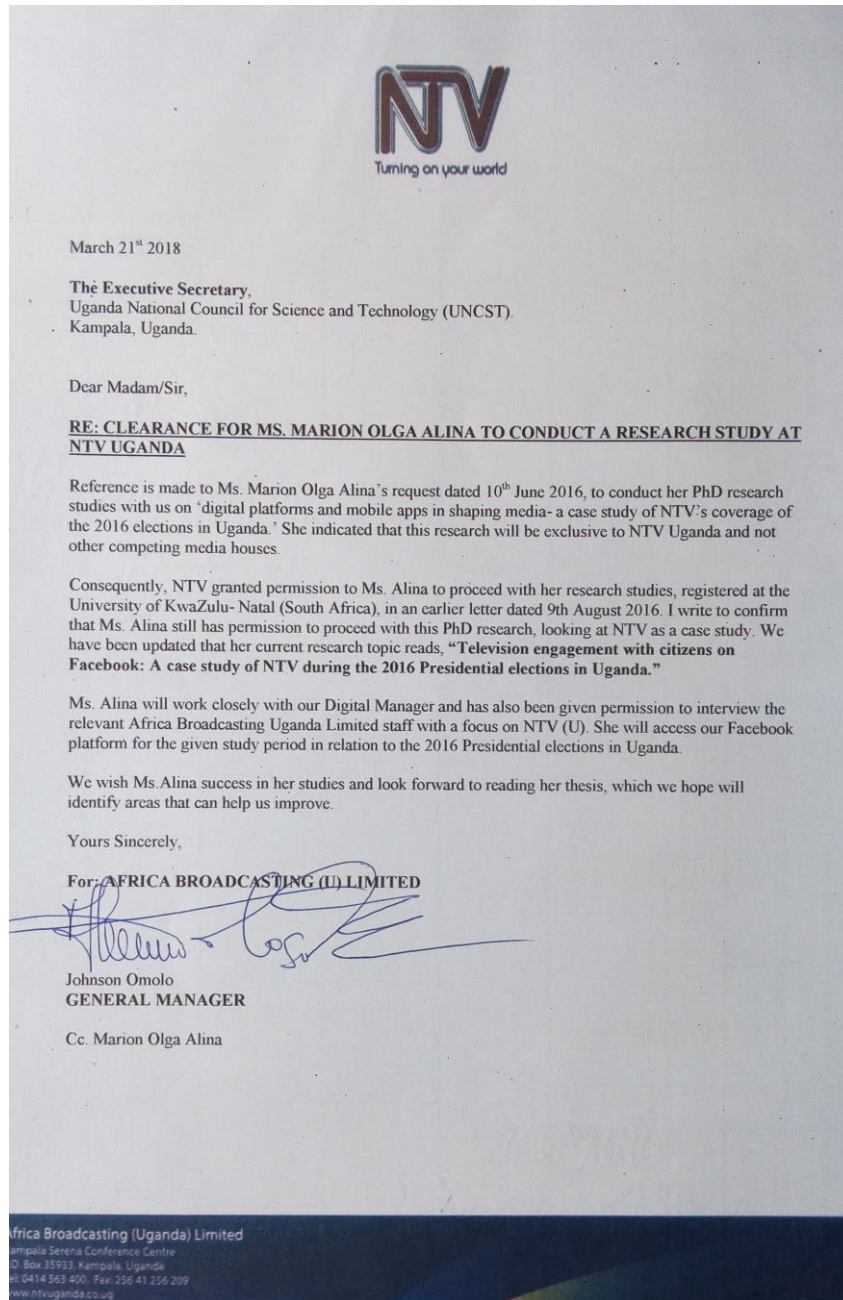
Solomon Muhiirwa

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER

c.c. Ethical Clearance Committee, Prof. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli

Africa Broadcasting (Uganda) Limited
Kampala, Uganda
P.O. Box 4000, Kampala, Uganda
Tel: 011 221 1111 Fax: 011 221 1111
www.abn.co.ug

Appendix B: Gatekeeper's letter from NTV-2



Appendix C: Collection of stories and comments for analysis

This appendix shows the overall nature of engagement on the NTV Facebook page across the eight stories and 240 comments chosen for analysis. Two streams of engagement with varying dimensions are demonstrated by this data set. One of these streams is rational debate on Facebook, demonstrated under the dimension of i) Acceptance of news content and ii) Resistance of news content. The second stream of engagement shows Facebook followers in dialogue. This dialogue is demonstrated as i) Followers in agreement and ii) followers in disagreement, with one another.

Nature of engagement: Rational debate of media content

Story 1:

January 1, 2016: Mbabazi expresses concerns over being shadowed by unknown men. Mbabazi fears that the men could be harbouring a sinister plot to harm him

Comments under the dimension of ‘Resistance of news content’

1. Mbabazi should know that more is still to come and he will soon understand the true meaning of being a member of opposition in Uganda. When he was enjoying the comfort of his long time friend, Dr. Besigye was sprayed, his finger was shot.
2. I can't sympathize with Mbabazi, he has caused a lot of pain and suffering to people and those supporting him are doing it purely for selfish reasons. Why didn't he stand firm on his feet while in government and say no to injustice and oppression? When Besigye was nearly killed where was Mbabazi? Mwesige Besigye,!!!! he is a straight, clean and focused man that is firm and stands for justice and equal rights. And by the way, who is Mbabazi? M7 has successfully dealt with more powerful, influential
3. I want to hear that Col Besigye is in gd conditions. others like him, i don't care. it's his turn, let him suffer
4. He said police was working within the law the day his (KB) car was smashed and sprayed with pepper in eyes at Mulago.

5. Some of us in kasangati ve faced more than knives and bars with besigye so that man jpam should stop crying like a baby
6. Mbabazi should live NTV and other media channels Churches, Mosques, and Ekiidieli (Uganda Ferry) alone let him do his campaign in peace not threatening Uganda people
7. thats what him mbabazi sowed and now is the time to reap
8. Sorry JPAM, your yet to see more, and imagine wat Besigye has been going thru.
9. In fact for i hv one word ! Besigye is a true pipo's president Ugandans please vote DR besigye come 18feb 2016
10. The US aspiring president promises to imprison museveni and Mugabe if elected in the US. Washington DC, US business mogul Donald Trump has put Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and Ugandan President , on notice, vowing to deal with them ruthlessly when he ascends to Presidency. Speaking while addressing war veterans in Washington, Trump warned other likeminded dictators who want to die in power, that their time is up and it's just a matter of time before they face justice. "I want to reiterate here before America's greatest heroes that I will not condone any dictatorial tendencies exhibited by dictators around the world especially the two old men from Zimbabwe and Uganda" Mugabe and Museveni must be put on notice that their days are numbered and that I am going to arrest them and lock them in prison. If the past American administrations have failed to stop these two despots, I will personally do it" Mugabe and Museveni have given the world enough troubles and it's about time someone puts to an end all these madness for peace to prevail" Sid Trump who seemed unapologetic. If Obama fears them, I will never fear them. If Clinton and Bush feared them, If the Pope kneels before them, I will never be reduced to that level. I will never be cowed. I promise to clean all the political mess around the world and promote international justice" Added Trump arrogantly.
11. We know dat m7 z under tensions frm mbabazi and kizza dat z y hz trying to creat fears on us. Bt let mi asure Ugandans dat, failure brings madness and stress well trying to arrest situation so dat z de current status of m7 and hz gov't. I wsh him bad luck and pray to God to restore change in dz ctry Uganda. Amen

12. Let him give us way # team 🙌🏾, nobody will sympyiz with u Mbabazi...leave politics to film star Col; Besigye.

Comments under the dimension of 'Acceptance of news content'

No acceptance of news content was registered for this story

Story 2:

January 3, 2016 Police deploy to block Besigye's school visits. Besigye tricked police who were trailing him and sneaked to a dam where animals share water with locals.

Comments under the dimension of 'Resistance of news content'

1. Why can't sevo also visit these schools.... Of course he would be ashamed of himself, tax payers drinking water with animals mbu steady progress
2. this man is giving Ec headache ...am expecting Ec to issue a statement no more visting water sources ...hahah uganda zaabu
3. It's really unfair to the people of Nankasongola to share that dirty water with animals. Billions of shillings have been lost through corruption which could help them get clean water.
4. KIGUNDU \$ KAYAIHURA doesn't know their work. EC stood up and warn candidates not to go to church. I think he has no right to stop someone from praising GOD. and kayaira stop misusing taxpayers money, whats wrong if BESINGYE visits hospitals or schools? shame on you
5. Mr kayihura, this is just a humble request. Please stop wasting taxpayers money in meaningless deployments. Think before u issue or follow that silly order. Deploy our men where there is value for money and time spent.
6. if they have done a lot in 30 years of there rule as NRM, why don't they a shame Dr.Kiiza for always telling lies to ugandans? why deploying heavy Police force? It means they

have done nothing in 30 years and indeed they have rotten health centres and schools.
Shame on Museveni.

7. Campaign of defiance, NRM is underdog here. handsup surrender to Uganda
Magufuli."KIIZA BESIGYE".
8. I petty Uganda police. How wd I know that pipo share water with cattle if they had not
blocked him?
9. They r d vry pipo who always scream mbu NRM pakalast....Nw Museveni wil reach dea
nd mek empty promises.....mbu he wil supply tap water in al dea houses let them drink
promises
10. Besigye is a rapist, Amama I will give you a try.
11. Police men without lank they can't control col kiiza besigye fast of all there primitive.
12. The police officers should be fired, how could Besigye sneak out of them?
13. Animals have single suit and nothing is hidden of them. NRM government is like those
animals with single suit. Now the keys are in the hands of Ugandans to open the house of
freedom am enjoying the last kicks of a dying horse... bye bye Museveni
14. What besigye is doing is good let the ec allow the man to contiue so that p'ple can see the
weakneses of Museveni
15. Being doctor is not for everyone ..that s why other s have no qualifications. ..Ugandans
unless embrace change as the only constant in life. .but if they don't Ugandans will
continue suffering.
16. #voteDrkizzabesigye 2016 to mark the end of dictatorship in Uganda
17. the truth of the matter js, Museveni, Besigye and Mbabazi are just power hungry no
leadershipki
18. No rtreat no surrender #DR KB our presdo come feb the choice of People In Arua&west
Nile
19. It is in Uganda where it is a crime for someone to contest as a president even when was
nominated by the National electrole commission
20. Next time police should guard water resources
21. People died at beaches where was police to protect them

22. Ntv also, don't say Dr. BESIGYE sneaked, the Dr went majestically to the pond in the name of a dam.

Comments under the dimension of 'Acceptance of news content'

1. The swaga of tha curent regime..Ugandans drinkin with animals..Thnx NTV 4 ur openness

Story 3

January 5, 2016 EC says the recent ban on visits to hospitals and places of worship for presidential candidates was not based on any law but on concern for privacy of patients and worshippers.

Comments under the dimension of 'Resistance of news content'

1. EC supports M7. have the patients &the worshipers complained that besigye should not go to them? EC must watch out.
2. the few hospitals and schools Col. Dr. Kizza Besigye has visited people have welcomed him with great Joy and he has be prayed for in the churches so can the EC give examples of who complained?
3. The Ec is neither religious nor health affiliated. So Kigundu stop confusions but pray to God to remove the incompetence in you. For you are partisan according to your statement.
4. My qtn 2 de Ec, have de church, hospitals, shls etc raised complains about political leader visting such place? f nt, then y stop them 4rm visting such places??
5. Thank you EC for being concerned about our privacy but why don't you worry about the privacy and safety of our votes and let the Medical teams and the Religious teams worry about patients and Sick people.
6. There were some people who wanted to see Jesus and they decided to build a tower to heaven BT time came and they started talking un cordinatedly and they failed.

Something we are seeing here. They are all in the same government BT talk differently. Why implement something that is out of law yet m7 himself doesn't respect it? He went to many prayer places at the new year eve BT could Besigye be allowed to do such? Dictators.

7. implying that if your a presidential candidate... you should never fall sick... neither should you pray till campaigns are done
8. What a shame! Taremwa always arrogantly says the EC follows only the law to the dot. The very reason defiance is inevitable.
9. Undue influence & unconsciouness lead to an unnecessary justification of stupid decisions. This is so clear, some people have dark intentions & don't want 2 be exposed or to expose their wickedness & treahcious acts. Sincerely if hospitals are in good conditions, why would people prevent someone from accessing them, Christ Jesus said "whatever is hidden shall come out & whatever is done in the dark shall be brought to light".
10. But proper politics is about issues inculding provision of services for the electorate. The more reason the contestants are free to visit these facilities like schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers etc to view how satisfactorily they have been managed in order to design a work plan in case any of them win. Its good politics to allow freedom to all candidates in these places. Even for the incumbent what we know many officials along the line of service provision have just been fleecing govt money from the ministries down to the district while giving the executive false reports about what they ve done on ground. Therefore exposing the rot will help the incumbent to strengthen the managemnt team to ensure good service provision. That is my view as a management analyst.
11. The EC works under of M7. The law in Uganda is M7.
12. What will the Ec do if the candidates fail to observe the ban since there is no law. Let these pipo think before they act
13. mr kigundu one day you will stand alone before ugandans to explain these whim-based pronouncements. now there is no law but a pronouncement was made by the EC, a body you head. you are legally cooked!

14. But the politicians are also visiting the hospitals out of concern for their poor states.
Stop unlawfulness. Do your work to avoid finding yourself in hell
15. I really support EC because it driving us where want to show the public want it means
to get even 1% from NRM stage managed election. and they will take us where we
want them to reach
16. Hospitals, schools etc are in bad conditions becoz these greedy officials have
insurance policies non of them goes there becoz they have collected wealth through
corruption. Now they prevent Besigye from exposing them. U find a Ugandan
chanting NRM wen he can't pay bills of a cheapest private clinic yet those he is
supporting fly out their kids to deliver from 1st world countries.
17. These candidates are members of different religious sects and therefore have to seek
providence from their God. I have no problem seeing a candidate in a worship place.
Salvation is for all!
18. Then why waste time using the word "ban" when you have no authority. When you
ban you anticipate breach. What was ECs plan in case of breach since you have no
law to back your case in court? Criminal, constitutional, human rights? #justridiculous
19. who complained to the EC???????? Patients or worshipers.
20. Patients and worshippers are not complaining.

Comments under the dimension of 'Acceptance of news content'

1. It is not like they refused the politicians to visit the facilities, it is the timing that is
hypocritical. For a man like Amama who is partially responsible for the current state of
the hospitals to visit them for vote purposes is pure mockery. As for Besigye, he should
have visited the hospitals in normal times not campaigning period.
2. This time EC is right here. Hospitals are not for campaigns. You trumatise those patients
more by exposing them on TVs and social media. I think politicians would still gain
popularity by donating to the hospitals other than visiting just to gain cheap popularity.
3. Kale Kaihura & kiggundu r protecting their jobs by accepting m7 order, anyway they
know that no law aveils on candidates visit to hospitals or schools, so they see that when

they part away 4rm m7 vos orders there fired, nd u pple well know employment is a problem, so lets blem m7 nd his supportes thats all

Story 4

January 6, 2016: Rugunda warns Besigye against defiance campaign. The premier also defended the role of crime preventers, saying they are critical in reinforcing the police that is thin on the ground.

Comments under the dimension of 'Resistance of news content'

1. But if you feel people still love your regime, why continue panicking with wanting to police the whole country like a cafew has been declared. I have seen popular governments like the one of tanzania where the president moves with a thin security as compared to Mr. rugundas that moves with mambos, police and ultimately now crime preventers. Anyway go cast your votes coz I Personally, i retired from voting in 2006 and will return to voting when the RULE OF LAW too returns which at the moment is dead.
2. SHEM ON YOU! old for nothing man; mbabazi used to talk like you do and as per now, he is being locked outside radio stations. u seems to be learned but u cant tell your boss that he is a dictator. having been in politics for long, you never learnt from history and as per now you cant read the timing. an educated being serving in a dictatorial government!
3. Your warning besigye about defiance u think it's the first time is hearing that this goverment u waste slot of time on non lmpotent issues that's why u have failed to do what your supposed to all the time besigye I thought is a presidential candidate to like president m7 and that's one of his ways is going to see that he wins and becomes president of republic of Uganda well we know most of you people in the NRM you fear to here that but truth this man m7 this time is going to go defiance is going to work

4. Do they think the poorly motivated police is happy with this government. they are about to regret why they trained some of them. Don't be surprised to see this crime preventers being the source of violence against the government leading to a violent change.
5. Rugunda is saying all these because of bulky amount of money given to him by his President Museveni So Rugunda should watch out.
6. Defiance, we Besigye we defy Rugunda warning our president, p10 is well working, we hold power no more intimidation
7. Why are you afraid of the defiance campaign? Besigye is threatening these boys with mere words. It's fear that has seized them. We Besigye Besigye
8. Rugunda worked with all the regimes of Uganda and now he is warning Kizza Besigye? His ends will bring disaster to his children.
9. Let Rugunda enjoy his money than being a puppet though that's what he was employed to be... Touch Besigye, incite violence..... We are tired of this regime that has murdered and impoverished Ugandans for their stay in power... #BesigyeIsOurPresidentElect, #WeBesigyeBesigye, #LindaBesigye
10. Vote Besigye as he is everything this country needs
11. Besigye just coined a word, and has not acted, and defiance is very legal. Even merely participating in an election is defiance. The problem is that they fear the consequence of what they want to do (rig) and want to blame it on Besigye.
12. I like defiance in relation to territorial behaviour among animals within their territories. so whoever is threatened by a mere word defiance should look for greener pastures elsewhere because we are heading to "a survival for the fittest slogan" I love the way the man talks about defiance
13. Pse Ndugu Rugunda don't allow these people to spoil your name by joining hate campaign against Col. Dr. Kizza Besigye you have been neutral all along and I think you should stay that way even after the collapse of this regime come Feb
14. Resistance and defiance who is worse than the other. What does NRM resist against? So if known, then KB is defying rightly. Hmmm Rugunda take care of ur grands the being used to tarnish ur dignity mzee

15. Please ndugu Rugunda.can we know what the movement is resisting even when in power. Let us stop defining concepts in our own way esp.conceots not originated by us. I will suggest the Govt should stop wasting time on non issues. Just ask Besigye or FDC what they are defying. Such rwckle# actions and utterances may cause problems and we regret later. Uganda or Africa is bigger than all of us. Let us be peaceful come 18th Feb. All this will go but let us avoid giving a reason for a looser to drug on way after claiming I was cheated.
16. I hear defiance, some where people are give money to shun and defy opposition rallies, the big question who is defying who?
17. NRM should leave besigye alone this is the sign of panic you are trying to tell us that your time is up why don't you come up and defend what Besigye says that you think is not true instead of scaring him and his supporters. We know you currently control everything do what you are supposed to do and let him do what he is supposed to do Besigye knows the law and he can't do anything out of it. You are just attracting our attention that he is really the next president of this beautiful peaceful green wealthy populated nation and a dream nation for many people around the world to live in.
18. kifefe knows the medicine not the law pse its amama who knows law but its not on his side ensi nzibu mawe! i cant believe what he is going thru
19. If Besigye has committed any crime, He should be brought to book under the laws of the republic of Uganda but not to decampaign him on allegations. No one is above the law he should be prosecuted if found guilty.
20. All the public wants to know. Is
- Under which Law do crime preventers come into existence.?
 - With the current deployment of UPF and UPDF why do we need such groups
 - how can the opposition trust a group of young men, that have been evidently seen dressed in NRM T-shirts in KOlolo
 - What role do the crime preventers. Have to play with the voters register

Comments under the dimension of ‘Acceptance of news content’

No acceptance of news content was registered for this story

Story 5

February 14, 2016: Debate panelist Shaka Ssali barred from asking president questions. For him to appear at the second debate, a government spokesperson has revealed that some conditions had to be met.

Comments under the dimension of ‘Resistance of news content’

1. If they can give conditions for just a debate I wonder how many such conditions have been given to EC's Kigundu! mbu for de sake of peace M7 Must win.
2. That is a sign of dictatorship
3. Is it safe to say that all other candidates were playing on levelled ground at the debate? He is used to having his way, he cdnt even do this one thing for Ugandans without pulling any strings and he expects us to still vote for a leader who dreads anything transparent and fair? Vote Besigye
4. For people who know Shaka, it was evident he was threatened. That's one guy who will put you in a corner. Feel sorry for ma country Uganda
5. Hahahha the first debate thy Claimed Allan was sent by M7 to grill Kizza now thy are coming up with stories mbu Shaka was barred..... These will be the same stories when mzee reclaims power
6. Organisers failed the debate though they won the first. M7 who arrogantly said the debate was 4the school children bowed to them by accepting to attend this time. I mean, we were even going to have a much better debate without m7,who is he to give orders?

Acceptance of news content

No acceptance of news content was registered for this story

Story 6

February 18, 2016: ED UCC, Godfrey Mutabazi says Mobile Money and social media were shut down because there was information that people were using these to bribe voters.

Comments under the dimension of 'Resistance of news content'

1. These guys should upgrade their thinking. UCC never created Internet so it can never limit or block its accessibility
2. How comes other countries can vote without blocking the social media and yet it's peaceful?
If it's a peaceful free and fare elections as you claim and yet everyone knows that they can only cast one vote why do you bring out all militants and police fully armed?
WE NEED CHANGE FOR UGANDA TO DEVELOP.
3. Please tell them they are under qualified for the job because as you can see we managed to access them sites!
4. Nonsense! @Using social media and mobile money to bribe voters. Really? Where were u when NRM was dishing out money in Mukono town to bribe voters?
5. They did this in favour of one candidate who has brobed every one..but just look in a month. ,pple will be crying of commodities going up...soon a kilo of sugar will go to nine thousands to pull back the money they have spend in their campaign. therez no such thing mbu uganda decides #M7_decides
6. Now UCC stop fooling around its Sevo that ordered you to shut down now your here saying Electoral Commission I wonder even What more are you hiding coz the whole world Knows Sevo rigged the votes

7. And time will come you celebrate Democratic martyrs like besigye as if you truly supported democracy when today you are the ones occult rating suppression of Ugandan peace. Vote and steal in this error is a bypass to literate democracy, Mark you change is inevitable
8. They should have shut down even sms services, because I received a msge from the President M7 campaign team at 8.00 am advising me to vote Mr. M7
9. Its so suprising! I cant tell who is fulling ugandans! Electoral commission have just said that they are not responsible for interference in social media access that theirs is to arrange elections and yet ucc is just posting that they are waiting for communication from electoral commission on either to switch on social media networks. WHO IS FOOLING WHO?
10. They want to ban us from access to information so that they can easily manipulate the out come of the results. Is there any who has bribed more than them? The möney they have been sending 2 villages? Access 2 information is a fundermental human right according 2 international standards.
11. There are no ballots in opposition strongholds, be fair as we transition from H.EM7 to our DR.BESIGYE
12. The government has failed to disperse voting material in time at the polling stations but can manage to cut off and sensor the media because it can!!! If this isn't an out right abuse of power and violation of people's freedoms I don't know what it is then. People who are still voting need to notice this and vote to change the situation in our country. This abuse of power should stop. #votethedictatorout
13. I am watching you right now but Mutabazi of a man could not see in his thinking that if some one falls sick at a time of this nature they are not entitled to medical care given that government hospitals are poorly facilitated. I hate that kind of thinking from a grown up man of his nature

Comments under the dimension of 'Acceptance of news content'

No acceptance of news content was registered for this story.

Story 7

February 19, 2016: Besigye and Mugisha Muntu have been arrested in Najjanakumbi

Comments under the dimension of 'Resistance of news content'

1. this is serious
2. Even in the Bible when Jesus entered into the Temple and found Isralites have changed it a market, he did not prayed for them he used violence to bring normance. So Ugandans if u want democracy be ready to shed blood.
3. I am continually shocked at what Museveni does. I have a theory that Museveni has got sexual feelings for Besigye. Besigye turned him down. And since then, Museveni has made his life hell. That is the only thing makes sense to me. Surely, nobody can be that corrupt that they would make a mockery of democracy on this scale, otherwise? Or can they?
4. There's no peace without democracy for Uganda. first things first, no one wants violence but change is needed so For God And My County,we do it the usual way. The African way of changing power. Democracy for peace at any cost. #ugandadecides #M7mustgo
5. liberators always turn out tyrants but anyway lets fight
6. It's clearly understood that yesterday Besigye received a tip off about ballots politicking and stuffing at a one residence in Naguru and the man reaching the location himself just got arrested by NRM police! NRM police never allowed anyone to find out
7. If the whole district of kiruhura can't reach 700people where do they come from in one polling station?
8. kiruhura registered voters 84,234
9. I like ur arguement based on figures not speculations
10. Yesterday we didn't receive updates about the other place were rigging of elections was going on but on case of besigye doing his own tally is arrested
11. yes...we need. the Naguru nrm safe house updates

12. I almost gave the same response, I don't need to add!!!. Did the police search that area anyway!!?
13. the president has already rigged the elections but its like all Tv platforms are afraid of him.none of them are talking about it.But they are quick to put anything on Besigye up...#UgandaDidntDecide

Acceptance of news content

No acceptance of news content was registered for this story

Story 8

February 20, 2016 Kiggundu: The commission declares candidate Yoweri Kaguta Museveni as the elected President of Uganda this 20/Feb/2016

Comments under the dimension of 'Resistance of news content'

1. God S Not Fair
2. kigundu decided da ghost elected president not pples elected
3. they should just put back our swt social media
4. am not voting is Museveni contests for presidency in 2021 coz its wastage of time while voting

Comments under the dimension of 'Acceptance of news content'

No acceptance of news content was registered for this story

Nature of engagement: Facebook followers in dialogue

Story 1:

January 1, 2016: Mbabazi expresses concerns over being shadowed by unknown men. Mbabazi fears that the men could be harbouring a sinister plot to harm him.

Comments under the dimension of ‘Followers in agreement’

1. Great view
2. And Mbabazi never condemned the above, he even geared the formulation of POMA to suffocate opposition rallies; now it's his turn to feel it.
3. great
wise ugandans still exist
4. trespassers are termed deadly and dangerous, if not so in your compound...gues alice it right on whatever drink ue enjoying.lols...
5. hahahaha he thought that things were easy with Besigye. let him see the true colours
6. Naye, is this not paranoia on his part? Many a time he has speculated, feared imaginary arrests of his person, preached imminent danger and threats to his safety and its all now beginning to sound like a comic strip and thread
7. if you want to see and feel the pinch which ugandans go through, then u leave the dinner table of NRM
8. I'm waiting for kayihura to arrest him or put 20 million as bounty to whoever gets him very sad for our country

Comments under the dimension of ‘Followers in disagreement’

1. We are keeping a very close eye on Yoweri Museveni. God help him if any harm comes to [Amama Mbabazi](#). For so long M7 has got away with murder, this time it will be him poking the behind of a leopard as he infamously said

2. How about Amama Mbabazi, you mean for him he hasn't gone away with some murders or you think the public forgot about the boyfriend to the daughter who was killed in cold blood at the kololo residence. Again why should you try to cut the hand that fed you, after stealing from the government now you want to protect whatever you stole..SHAME
3. What have you been drinking? Boyfriend to the daughter? Is that what M7 has been telling you?
4. Mbabazi stop fooling ugandanz.u ve been in this fake govt enjoying now its when u ve seen the harrasement. Besigye in 2011 was beaten to death [sic}. ddnt you watch it on NTV and keep quiet. Am tired of your lies to win peoples sympathy
5. its not fooling if you watched NTV @ 9:00 there was a man in suit carrying naked knife at Hon JPAM rally!
6. Why should people who want to harm you walk with you hundreds of kilometers for several days if they need to harm you. Which type of armour are you wearing that makes them fail to harm you in a day or hours? Those statements aimed at evoking sympathy have been used by many and have not reaped from them. They have become mere clitches and unpopular songs heard and tired!
7. Sam... Mafias can trail their victim even for years.... Watching and waiting to make the victims.. Death look natural
8. Bob, mafias don't leave trails. And it takes a mafia to trap a mafia. So that means you agree with the theory that the complainer is a senior mafia. Everyone has cried foul because of his mafia activities and the last one was his long time confidant M7. The senior mafia does not need to cry foul, he should quietly enjoy the music whose tune &piper he called. Have ever heard Carlos the Jaco pleading?
9. Was just letting you know about their business
10. Mafias don't spill beans naawe. He is either giving up or appealing to sympathy. JPAM is not a KB type to cry foul. His network is as intricate as a Samurai fighter that when you fail, you conduct a self destruction using your own sword, not to cry foul. So if he is failing, lets see him do the same, ideally

Story 2:

January 3, 2016 Police deploy to block Besigye's school visits. Besigye tricked police who were trailing him and sneaked to a dam where animals share water with locals.

Comments under the dimension of 'Followers in agreement'

1. wait tomoro
2. YOU ARE RIGHT
3. What besigye is doing is good let the ec allow the man to contiue so that p'ple can see the weakneses of museveni
4. Brother MUHUMUZA, please come down, you already have the keys, just go and vote Ugandan Magufuli "Kiiza Besigye".
5. hahaa Ndugu Okot am just watching the space
6. Let's vote Col Besigye for a new Uganda because he know de kind of leaving we are going through
7. Vote Dr Kiiza Besigye for social transformation and liberation

Comments under the dimension of 'Followers in disagreement'

Followers did not disagree with each other on this story.

Story 3

January 5, 2016 EC says the recent ban on visits to hospitals and places of worship for presidential candidates was not based on any law but on concern for privacy of patients and worshippers.

Comments under the dimension of ‘Followers in agreement’

1. Patient Kayiguta complained
2. kayiguta?
3. Tell them
4. They are jokers as usual, they think de law doesn't exist bse de big man appointed them he will dump them soon after using them and he will charge them with treason for rape of de constitution

Comments under the dimension of ‘Followers in disagreement’

1. KB is only allowed to move freely during campaign period otherwise he is always confined by Police at his Kasangati home" and not allowed to visit his businesses in town or even his home village of Rukungiri.
2. is that true? How comes I see Besigye going to America, why don't they deny him access to the airport? #Ndeda, program yovr self to reason with ideas that differ from yours.
3. U have a point

Story 4

January 6, 2016: Rugunda warns Besigye against defiance campaign. The premier also defended the role of crime preventers, saying they are critical in reinforcing the police that is thin on the ground.

Comments under the dimension of ‘Followers in agreement’

1. M bro never give up, Dats a loop hole for Diz pple t forge votes, vote for d candidate u want! Den we see wat nxt

2. A person who doesn't is the worst person coz it means he has definitely supported bt un knowingly. Votes are counted one by one. Now what wil they count if not voted for.swt rebuke that arrogant motive coz u wil not support the change bt support the existing one. Thanks
3. Hw Much Is He(Rugunda) Earning?[#Asiku](#)
4. Do have evidency
5. Mat Madrid, know that what timothy is nailing is true. Just relax and accept it.
6. [#MAT](#) Madrid as per the footage from the 09:00pm bulletin on NTV ,NBS, what transpired in the Kololo acceptance event after the Namboole Nominations of Candidate.
7. If you are not ready to fight or die for something.!!! Then you are living for nothing!!! This time round we need power back to us.!! We need to have a say.! our rights respected and equal dispense of resources.!! We are ready to confront intimidation, planned brutality name it.!!! We gonna defend our country against crooks enough is enough.!! Change is coming.!!!defiance may this time become a necessary evil.!![#wesige](#) Besigye.

Comments under the dimension of 'Followers in disagreement'

1. which govt is collapsing in feb?
2. If you're on zero Facebook you can't understand
3. I wonder what u'll do if he doesn't win!

Story 5

February 14, 2016: Debate panelist Shaka Ssali barred from asking president questions. For him to appear at the second debate, a government spokesperson has revealed that some conditions had to be met.

Comments under the dimension of 'Followers in agreement'

1. Edward,,,,,,NTV, Ofondo and others are talking about unfavourable conditions given in whats to be a free and fair election. so u ar malinformed here
2. As Ugandans wat have we done about the electoral commission of the nation being conditioned by one single man and his fake heartless advisors
3. Dude That true
4. U r right. I can imagine how he instructs kigundu. Now I believe M7 rigs votes.
5. Brilliant Brain
6. u r right
7. Great man
8. I said it too. The debate was so skewed. Talking abt foreign policy where the incumbent has the advantage of experience over the others. Anyway let's vote KB.We are tired of this nonsense.
9. the right position for kiiza is challenger not a president so lets keep him in the opposition
10. #Kugonza, How about we make him (Mr Besigye) president to challenge our country's problems since M7 is just a president not a challenger
11. wesige Besigye.kb all the way
12. Yeah. even at one time the presenter was reminded that it's candidate Museveni..not President Museveni
13. Mbu once a president always a president but it won't help him
14. I suppose what we had was presidential candidates' debates, lol.
15. Ofwono said it himself. U mean u don't watch news? Be informed.
16. Tell him
17. Propaganda
18. lets face reality here.shaka did not ask m7 any question apart from the last phase.
19. M7 survived that way the Shaka was going to eat him... Heheee

Comments under the dimension of 'Followers in disagreement'

1. Are u saying Ugandans dont vote for m7? Shaka is biased, some of u have never listened to his programs bse u are not informed
2. Opio ssebo,who told u we dont watch his programs, dont ashame da easterners....is there any government without critics.....
3. Opio Edward please don't use derogatory statements while replying to my comment!
Thank you
4. wasting your time to vote & we knw M7 has already rigged
5. M7 wasn't a President at the time of the debate, which President was again there? I me I only saw Presidential candidates!

Story 6

February 18, 2016: ED UCC, Godfrey Mutabazi says Mobile Money and social media were shut down because there was information that people were using these to bribe voters.

Comments under the dimension of 'Followers in agreement'

1. Thanx
2. Have you seen them????????
3. Bro, a u born today ?? This is how Uganda has been for 30yrs
4. M7 regime knows too well that it is losing and therefore want to prevent access to infor by all means to ensure Ugandans don't get to know the truth. Yes, Besigye is winning but M7 will be sworn in.
5. This is how they've been fooling ugandans
6. We are accessing everything to the maximum,"Orbot","tunnel bear" and www.proxysite.com are all helping us to access social media.[#basembye](https://twitter.com/basembye)
7. Can someone help how to do it?
8. can what's app work?
9. Yes
10. download secure vpn now

11. tru dat man one ug one pple
12. Dats right victor u have talked a point, wat we need is change 100%
13. yah gal, i can acess mine and actually surprised tht they were blockd
14. Cathy you hit it head on and i like your boldness.

Comments under the dimension of ‘Followers in disagreement’

1. they were right to close the social media, coz some of you dont know how to use it!
2. First write correct grammar before replying on my comment #UPE
3. what do u mean, violet?

Story 7

February 19, 2016: Besigye and Mugisha Muntu have been arrested in Najjanakumbi

Comments under the dimension of ‘Followers in agreement’

1. As long as Kiggundu is chairman EC, and Museveni stands, no other person will win even if the election is organised in Heaven and Jesus, Angel michael and Gabriel stand against Museveni.
2. That is not true, Jesus would extinguish M7 with a snap of a finger. But he is giving M7 enough rope to hang himself.
3. Cool down plz
4. so true
5. Praying for Uganda.
6. Thanks am also on my knees
7. even cows voted
8. 700people?...Is there any district in uganda that has a popn of less than 700?
9. the quotation was for a polling station not a district

10. Uganda at this point we only need God. ...coz as ugandans m 7 has turned us into fools. .u vote but he is still declared president. .u protest tear gas is fired. .now we should just hand over this Nation to God and God Will hear our plea. ...poor ugandans...ooh my fellow citizens we have a heavy buggage to carry on our backs but for the next five years pipo still putting on yellow continue but ull enjoy ur yellow. ..five years more we shal see..the youth should just go dig in The Village. .othawise no job.upe. ..high taxes. ..bad roads. ..oh my God We need you daddy in Heaven
11. Following this exercise from Kenya. May peace reign in Uganda even as you go through this tough time. Love you all.
12. now I'm here at kibuye round moving to da scene!
13. Our president though its mob intimidation we still gotta love for you

Comments under the dimension of 'Followers in disagreement'

1. That's ridiculous. If Museveni allows Besigye to be constantly assaulted, then he will have to deal with being insulted.
2. Ugandans don't loose hope! The dictator fighting for a fifith term claims he went to the bush to fight coz of vote rigging does he hav remember this? Ugandans don't let Dr. Besigye down!
3. He is uganda's Liberator
4. Besigye is aliberator? no i don't think if so he shld be wiz plan B to liberate ugandans we a tired of dat man m7

Story 8

February 20, 2016 Kiggundu: The commission declares candidate Yoweri Kaguta Museveni as the elected President of Uganda this 20/Feb/2016

Comments under the dimension of 'Followers in agreement'

1. every ugandans believes with me that col.Dr. kizza Besigye is the people's elected president Naye kigundu will be judged type AMEN
2. Amen
3. amen
4. Amen
5. Amen
6. AMEN
7. AMEN
8. Amen
9. Amen, may kigundu b judged
10. AMEN!!!
11. amen,may God judge him accordingly!
12. Amen
13. Amen
14. Amen!
15. aamen may there dayz b shortned
16. Amen
17. Amen
18. amen
19. Amen
20. everything shall pass away, but the word of our God remains forever.is only God who knows the heart of man and will give gudgements according to the deeds. God is the answer and will wipe every tears of his chosen people. amen
21. AMEN Simon God is looking
22. Amen

Comments under the dimension of 'Followers in disagreement'

1. waaaaaaa which people? may be minority
2. you have a big problem the people's president is Col Dr kizza Besigye that's all rigging imagine the support we had
3. unless u pray from bat valley coz they love to kill pipo
4. haha, Just accept that Majority of Ugandans hav spoken let's respect their opinion, dats democracy for you, Majority rule over minority

Appendix C: Ethical clearance letter from UKZN

6 October 2017

Ms Marion Alina 216072476
School of Applied Human Sciences
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Alina

Protocol reference number: HSS/1741/017D

Project title: Television engagement with citizens on Facebook: A case study of Nation Television during the 2016 presidential elections in Uganda)

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 14 September 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



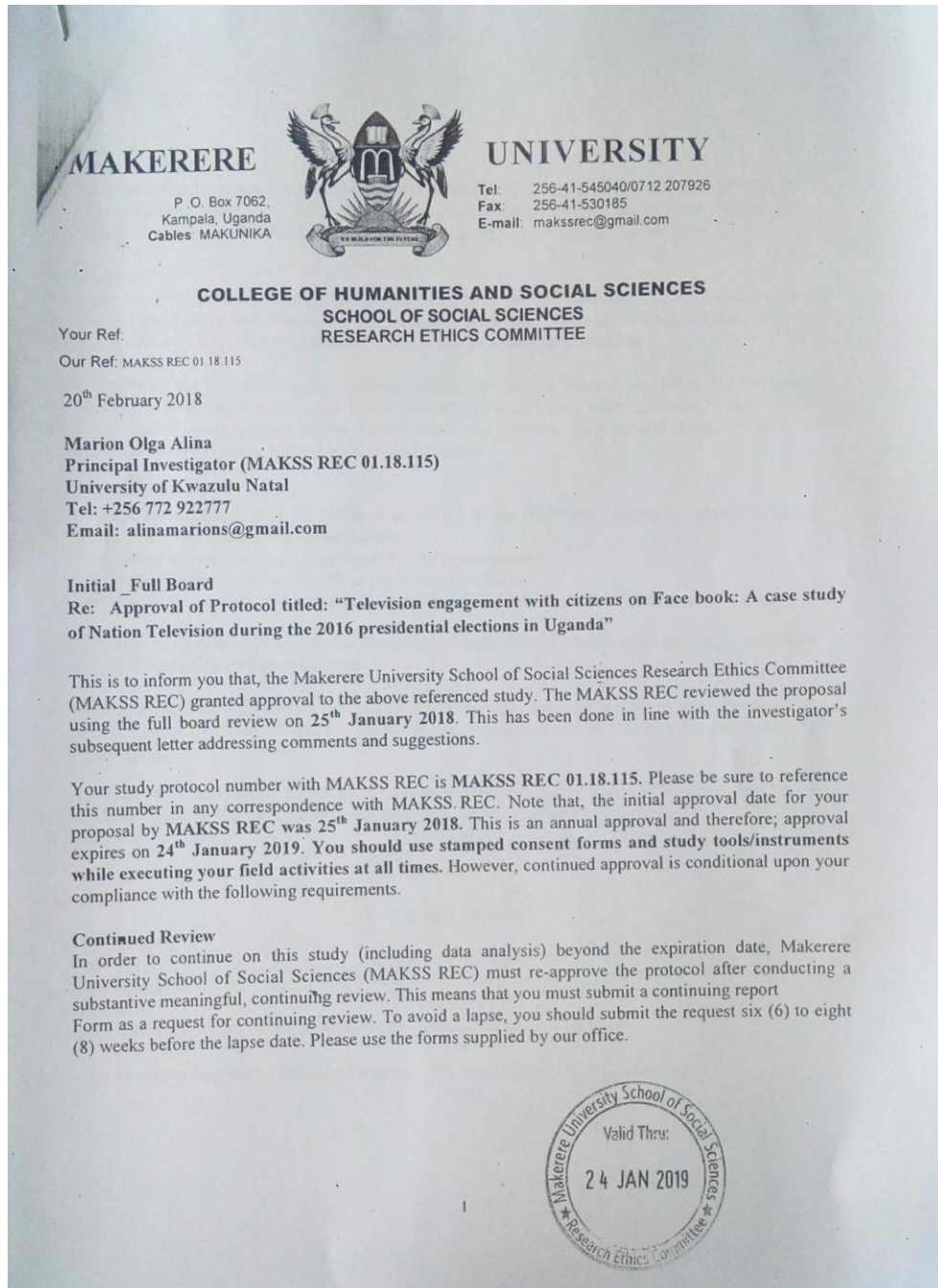
.....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Given Mutinta
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Jean Steyn
cc. School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Appendix D: Makerere University Research Ethics Committee approval



ase also note the following:

- No other consent form(s), questionnaires and or advertisement documents should be used. The Consent form(s) must be signed by each subject prior to initiation of my protocol procedures. In addition, each research participant should be given a copy of the signed consent form.

Amendments

During the approval period, if you propose any changes to the protocol such as its funding source, recruiting materials or consent documents, you must seek Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee (MAKSS REC) for approval before implementing it.

Please summarise the proposed change and the rationale for it in a letter to the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee. In addition, submit three (3) copies of an updated version of your original protocol application- one showing all proposed changes in bold or "track changes" and the other without bold or track changes.

Reporting

Among other events which must be reported in writing to the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee include:

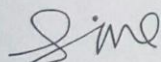
- i. Suspension or termination of the protocol by you or the grantor.
- ii. Unexpected problems involving risk to participants or others.
- iii. Adverse events, including unanticipated or anticipated but severe physical harm to participants.

Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions. Thank you for your cooperation and commitment to the protection of human subjects in research.

The legal requirement in Uganda is that, all research activities must be registered with the National Council for Science and Technology. The forms for this registration can be obtained from their website www.unsct.go.ug

Please contact the Administrator of Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee at makssrec@gmail.com OR bijulied@yahoo.co.uk or telephone number +256 712 207926 if you counter any problem.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Stella Neema
Chairperson

Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee



c.c.: The Executive Secretary, Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

Appendix E: Uganda National Council for Science and Technology approval



Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

(Established by Act of Parliament of the Republic of Uganda)

Our Ref: SS 4547

9th April 2018

Ms. Marion Olga Alina
Principal Investigator
Makerere University
Kampala

Re: Research Approval: Television Engagement with Citizens on Facebook: A Case Study of Nation Television during the 2016 Presidential Elections in Uganda

I am pleased to inform you that on 26/03/2018, the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) approved the above referenced research project. The Approval of the research project is for the period of 26/03/2018 to 26/03/2019.

Your research registration number with the UNCST is **SS 4547**. Please, cite this number in all your future correspondences with UNCST in respect of the above research project.

As Principal Investigator of the research project, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. All co-investigators must be kept informed of the status of the research.
2. Changes, amendments, and addenda to the research protocol or the consent form (where applicable) must be submitted to the designated Research Ethics Committee (REC) or Lead Agency for re-review and approval **prior** to the activation of the changes. UNCST must be notified of the approved changes within five working days.
3. For clinical trials, all serious adverse events must be reported promptly to the designated local IRC for review with copies to the National Drug Authority.
4. Unanticipated problems involving risks to research subjects/participants or other must be reported promptly to the UNCST. New information that becomes available which could change the risk/benefit ratio must be submitted promptly for UNCST review.
5. Only approved study procedures are to be implemented. The UNCST may conduct impromptu audits of all study records.
6. An annual progress report and approval letter of continuation from the REC must be submitted electronically to UNCST. Failure to do so may result in termination of the research project.

Below is a list of documents approved with this application:

	Document Title	Language	Version	Version Date
1.	Research proposal	English	N/A	N/A
2.	In – depth interview consent forms	English	1.0	January 2018
3.	In – depth interview guides	English	N/A	N/A

Yours sincerely,

Beth Mutumba
For: Executive Secretary

UGANDA NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Copied to: Chair, Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

LOCATION/CORRESPONDENCE

Plot 6 Kimera Road, Ntinda
P. O. Box 6884
KAMPALA, UGANDA

COMMUNICATION

TEL: (256) 414 705500
FAX: (256) 414-234579
EMAIL: info@uncst.go.ug
WEBSITE: <http://www.uncst.go.ug>

Appendix G: Interview guide for journalists

Preamble:

My name is Marion Olga Alina, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. I thank you for accepting to take part in this study which seeks to understand how Nation Television uses Facebook to enhance citizen participation in current affairs. I hope to tap into your experience and involvement in the February 2016 elections as a **Journalist** at Nation Television Uganda, for purposes of this research.

You have a right to confidentiality and anonymity. Therefore, you are allowed **not to** answer all questions and you are can take a break or leave the interview at any time. Please note that the interview will be tape recorded for future reference and to ensure that you are not misquoted. You will be required to sign an informed consent form as proof of acceptance. Thank you.

Interview

1. What is your name?
.....
2. How long have you worked at NTV Uganda?
.....
3. Briefly describe the kind of stories you covered during the 2016 elections in Uganda.
.....
4. Were some of these stories posted on the official NTV Facebook page?
.....
5. If yes, which of these stories attracted high participation by citizens on Facebook?
.....

6. Did you engage the participants on Facebook to provide additional information/clarification on the stories you covered?

.....

7. Do you think social media is an independent platform for expression of views?

.....

8. Explain your answer in question 7 above.

.....

Thank you

Appendix H: Interview guide for editors

Preamble:

My name is Marion Olga Alina, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. I thank you for accepting to take part in this study which seeks to understand how Nation Television uses Facebook to enhance citizen participation in current affairs. I hope to tap into your experience and involvement in the February 2016 elections as an **Editor** at Nation Television Uganda, for purposes of this research.

You have a right to confidentiality and anonymity. Therefore, you are allowed **not to** answer all questions and you are can take a break or leave the interview at any time. Please note that the interview will be tape recorded for future reference and to ensure that you are not misquoted. You will be required to sign an informed consent form as proof of acceptance. Thank you.

Interview

1. What is your name?
.....
2. How long have you worked at NTV?
.....
3. What type of stories on the 2016 elections did you assign journalists to cover?
.....
4. Which of these stories were posted on the official NTV Facebook page?
.....
5. What informs your choice to post/not to post certain stories?
.....
6. How did you engage citizens on Facebook?
.....
7. How do you treat posts generated by the citizens on Facebook?

.....

8. Do you think social media is an independent platform for expression of views?

.....

9. Explain your answer in question 7 above.

.....

Thank you

Appendix J: Interview guide for online content managers

Preamble:

My name is Marion Olga Alina, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. I thank you for accepting to take part in this study which seeks to understand how Nation Television uses Facebook to enhance citizen participation in current affairs. I hope to tap into your experience and involvement in the February 2016 elections as an **online content manager** at Nation Television Uganda, for purposes of this research.

You have a right to confidentiality and anonymity. Therefore, you are allowed **not to** answer all questions and you are can take a break or leave the interview at any time. Please note that the interview will be tape recorded for future reference and to ensure that you are not misquoted. You will be required to sign an informed consent form as proof of acceptance. Thank you.

Interview

1. What is your name?
.....
2. How long have you managed online content at NTV?
.....
3. What social media platforms do you manage at NTV?
.....
4. What is your experience in managing the different platforms?
.....
5. Regarding Facebook, what informs your decision to maintain or censor certain comments?
.....
6. Do you have regular fans who post?
.....
7. What is your view on the use of social media in Uganda?

-
8. How would you describe the use of social media during the 2016 elections?
.....
9. Would you say there is need to regulate social media use in Uganda?
.....
10. What is your biggest challenge as an online content manager?
.....
11. What are the demographics of your respondents?